



Landscape
Tells the Way
Illawarra

Curated by Riste Andrievski

Suzanne Archer

Sophie Cape

Elisabeth Cummings

Warwick Keen

Steve Lopes

Jo Lyons

Euan Macleod

Noel McKenna

Reg Mombassa

Riste Andrievski

Idris Murphy

Lucy O'Doherty

Amanda Penrose Hart

Foreword

Illawarra has a long and rich First Nation history predating white settlement by thousands of years. While colonial practices have had significant impact on First Nation cultural traditions. Aboriginal art and culture continue to provide important perspectives for contemporary and future generations.

Since the early 1800's Illawarra has seen waves of settlement by various people all of whom have had a significant impact on the landscape, community, and identity of the region. Much of this social and cultural change has been documented by numerous artists visiting the region, which had a reputation for its picturesque beauty.

Far from neutral, artists have always provided depictions of the landscape shaped by contemporary concerns. The resulting representations evoke natural and fabricated environments as a means of contemplating our individual and collective experiences of our surrounding environments and spaces.

Illawarra has been punctuated by cultural incursions, such as industry and migration throughout its most recent history, which have shaped and transformed the landscape in significant ways.

Landscape Tells the Way: Illawarra is an ambitious exhibition. Curated by artist photographer Riste Andrievski it brings together thirteen contemporary artists working across diverse practices to provide their unique and personal perspectives of Illawarra's landscape. Embedding themselves in the landscape over the past twelve months the artists have upended conventions and expectations to provide unfamiliar and sometimes surprising perspectives to familiar places.

Depicting unconventional views of the land, the works in this exhibition demonstrate how understandings of place are strongly shaped by perspective, whether personal and subjective or based in shared tradition.

The artworks not only identify the geography and place landscapes within a social and historical context, but also reveal each artist's personal connections to place. The artists in *Landscape Tells the Way: Illawarra* have embarked on a creative odyssey to not only celebrate Illawarra's natural beauty, but also to delve into its overlooked and lesser celebrated industrial, urban, and social environs.

Interacting within this broader notion of regional landscape, the artists reveal the sometimes-hidden relation between landscape and identity, and the human practices within spaces that help shape community.

We would like to thank the participating artists for sharing their passion, commitment, and unique perspectives with us. We would especially like to thank exhibition curator Riste Andrievski for his tireless work to bring this exhibition together. A proud Illawarra resident, Riste's resolute desire to showcase our unique regional landscape and celebrate our history and diversity has culminated in presenting an exceptional and important exhibition for locals and visitors to this area.

We look forward to sharing this distinctive vision of Illawarra with you.

John Monteleone
Program Director, Wollongong Art Gallery



Image: Noel McKenna, *Half House*, 2023, Cringila oil on plywood, 40x40cm.
Courtesy Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney.

from the summit we gaze
down at the tiny container ships
in port where we'd stood last night
and they'd towered over us, where
we'd watched trucks dump slag
into giant containers one by one
in the slow parade of humming
engines and glowing red brake lights,
while the mountain looked down on us.

Jo Lyons, from 'Illawarra Mirror', *Fire Flowers* 2023

Landscape Tells the Way Illawarra

In this slender zone between the Illawarra Escarpment and the ocean, there is so much to see: so much for the eye to fall upon, the brain to interpret, the imagination to run with. There seem, here, to be many more perspectives from which to view one's surrounds than in other places; a much denser concentration of very different elements and colours. For artists and poets, it's extravagantly fecund territory.

Works in the collection of the Wollongong Art Gallery tell a story of how the ancient features of Dharawal Country have been overwritten since 1813. Visiting artists of the mid-nineteenth century depicted tall figs, their trunks wreathed in vines, looping ropes of creepers, tree ferns, epiphytes and cabbage trees in dappled patches of forest; yet their distant views of Lake Illawarra show how extensively the land had been cleared by the end of the 1860s. By the time Grace Cossington Smith visited Thirroul in the mid-1930s, white people in knitted togs were frolicking in the sea.

Startling contrasts between the natural, industrial and municipal aspects of the place emerge strongly in post-World War II art from the Gallery's collection. Max Dupain made separate silver gelatin photographs in the 1950s recording a steam train at Port Kembla, and pristine Stanwell Park beach. David Moore's colour photographs from the mid-1960s document life at the steelworks at its height – workers coming off shift, and the structures of the plant dwarfing cars on its service roads. For his bird's-eye *White night Kembla* 2000 Jan Senbergs compressed the manufacturing zone into an impenetrable thicket of white, yellow and blue. By contrast, Tony Ameneiro's small *Corrimal coke oven* 2006 feels like a too-close view of a secret, frightening place.

A subsection of works in the Wollongong Art Gallery collection depicts unassuming, unpretentious domestic structures: Frank Nowlan's *Thirroul Sheds* series from 2007; Jasmin Carter's 2011 images of small, original houses amidst brutal city buildings; and Noel McKenna's *Wollongong House* 2000. Riste Andrievski's *Industrial urban landscape* and *Cringila* 2017 combine elements of unrenovated weatherboard, fibro and brick houses hanging onto blocks on undulating streets; chimneys; powerlines; smoke; rooftops; and rampant shrubs.

Many works in *Landscape Tells the Way* breathe fresh life into these loose subject categories. The exhibition was Riste Andrievski's initiative. Born in Macedonia, he was a baby when his parents moved to Australia in 1974. His father found employment at Port Kembla steelworks and the family settled in blue-collar Cringila, a suburb with a concentration of Macedonian residents. Riste went to art school, majoring in printmaking, but photography was always part of his practice, and came to predominate. Some time ago,

he began photographing artworks for catalogues. His works featured in a number of group shows and competitions; he had a solo exhibition, *Pecalba: An Industrial Migrant Landscape* at Wollongong Art Gallery in 2020–2021.

One way or another, Riste has met many of the most prominent and celebrated contemporary east-coast Australian artists. Through introducing some of them to the Illawarra, he aimed to expand its 21st century representation. He arranged for them to stay, one by one, at the Gallery's rooftop flat, and guided them around the region, including the steelworks. It was a special day when he took the venerable Elisabeth Cummings deep into the escarpment. He was privileged and delighted to see her aesthetic reaction to its forms and colours, rocks and soils.

A simple thrill of any exhibition about a place is that of recognition: 'That's our street!' Secondly, a group exhibition about place exposes viewers to a broad range of art styles and mediums – particularly noticeable when different artists depict similar views.

Landscape paintings by Amanda Penrose Hart are typically dramatic pictures, in which the natural world seems to thrum with powerful human emotions. Having painted at Gallipoli and on the Western Front, each of which had its own Hill 60 – 60m above sea level – Amanda was curious about Port Kembla's. From that vantage point, the daughter of a merchant seaman painted grand panoramas of MM Beach comprising long black sheds by dark peacock-blue water, a narrow curve of sand, glimmering lights, cargo ships on the horizon, clouds scudding across the moon. Noel McKenna rendered a section of harbour in a radically different, dry and sharp manner; his looks like a little toy waterfront, its international cargo vessel modest and unassuming.

Noel McKenna's built his career on restrained depiction of neat houses with diffident inhabitants. He's the very man to depict a cat sitting thinking in the driveway of a green fibro dwelling; a man watering the lawn around his unadorned red-roofed home; the curious 'half house' of Warrawong, locals passing heedlessly. Like Noel, Lucy O'Doherty's no stranger to the depiction of a modest twentieth-century home; she's painted scores of them. Noel depicts angular structures in slightly skewy freehand; Lucy works oil paint and pastels in intense neon shades to achieve her distinctive blurred, soft effects; but the works of both artists give rise to a lonely kind of yearning in the viewer.

Interesting as it is when two artists depict a similar scene, it's intriguing, too, when two artists stand in the same place, look around, and opt to depict opposing views.

Steve Lopes made paintings for this exhibition along the pine-spiked coast from Kiama to Austinmer. The son of a Sicilian immigrant crane driver, Steve talked about life, fishing and art with Riste as they headed north on Lawrence Hargrave Drive. They stopped at the Scarborough Wombarra cemetery, where the occupants rest between escarpment and ocean. Steve painted a gentle impression of the headstones. By contrast, on a different trip, Reg Mombassa turned his back on the weatherworn graves, to depict two twisting trees on the cemetery's coastal edge. North up the cliffside road, and down into the village of Otford on the left, Reg noted the uselessness of a tennis court's wire fence against the leaf litter so characteristic of the area. The witty artist stood at Flagstaff Hill, one of the city's key tourist destinations – scrupulously mown and fenced, seething with people running, cycling, scoffing chips, composing selfies – and thought to depict the buildings of the Wollongong CBD: a crowd of oblongs, looking like robot costumes made of white cardboard.

Riste's majestic, mysterious and confronting visions of the interior of the steelworks evoke both its glory days from the 1940s to 1980, and the disuse that's crept over the site over the past 40 years. Equally potent are his images

CHILDHOOD DREAMS

Cringila and Figtree

When you took me to your old neighbourhood,
you shifted mine. Growing up, I saw
the steelworks skyline every time I rode a bus,
walked, drove in a car down Bellevue Road.

The steelworks *was*
your neighbourhood.

. . . Smoke and sulphur and steam.

Were those your dreams?

No, you dreamt of flying from the mountain under
which I slept.

So why was I the one
dreaming of fire?

Jo Lyons, extract from *Fire Flowers* 2023

of the sublime landscape of the escarpment, suggesting how it may have appeared to Dharawal, Gundungurra and Wodi Wodi language speakers who moved through the Illawarra region before white incursion. His meeting with poet Jo Lyons, who also grew up in Wollongong, led to a dark creative duet in which the Illawarra becomes a place of dreams and longing, vivid physical memory and transfiguration: of molten metal into flowers, girl into woman, strangers into people with much to discuss.

Warwick Keen, a Gomeroi man living in Nowra, is an artist, curator and multidisciplinary artist with mixed-media works in the collection of Wollongong Art Gallery and a mural on its exterior. In this exhibition, Warwick explores his experience of both wild and urban areas of Dharawal Country by painting patterns alluding to those on scar trees in various Aboriginal lands. His representation of Country is consciously pared-back, his greens and blues limited, his greys referring to his own presence, the roads that web the land, and the steel industry central to the history of Australian prosperity.

Warwick is one of the artists in *Landscape Tells the Way* employing gestural, expressionist and abstract approaches to landscape. In the context of this exhibition, areas of Sophie Cape’s stunningly tempestuous, elemental works read as hot, hard sea cliffs, scrappy bushes and water splashing and ebbing. South coast soil and gritty metal sand are literally integral to them. Euan Macleod’s is a different take on the seaside. Recurring throughout his body of work are unclothed figures trudging amidst overwhelming rocks, yawning chasms, churning seas and precipitous bridges. The odds seem against them. Amongst the cliffs, quarries and mills of the Illawarra are plenty of places that might provide settings for Euan’s anguished paintings: *Under the bridge with wave Seacliff* may have been a departure point. It’s a little surprising to see that the ruffled surface of his Bulli beach pool sparkles in sunlight; his beachgoers and pedestrians are companionable, encamped near the flags, seated comfortably on springy grass and moving reassuringly close to handrails.

The act of *seeing* is the theme of mighty works by Suzanne Archer. Anchoring her works in blood-red strings and grids suggesting nets, or the backings of complex tapestries, she evokes a person’s meditative walk along the waterline, head down, scanning the sand for interesting shapes. Studying the pictures, our eyes light on beads, ribbons and rags of algae; skeletal fragments; shells; driftwood; sponges; castings and tracks of worms and crabs; a slender bird, beached by pitiless winds. Paintings by the innovative landscapist Idris Murphy parallel our relationship with, and response to, separate elements we see around us all at once; his wonderfully coloured works require study of details and whole, details and whole, over and over. Gradually emerge a ship; stars; vegetation; a cliff face; once we see them, we can’t imagine not being able to see them. Idris remarked to Riste that the forms and hues of what’s around a tree are what shapes our view of the tree. Riste found it a useful way to look at Idris’s pictures, and a revelation to apply to his own compositions.

Landscape Tells the Way affords immediate visual joy. Needless to say, any one of its works would enrich a private home. I’d love several for my own walls. Yet taking a longer, wider view – a generous view – any of these pictures would be of more benefit to the collection of a public art gallery. The visions of place in this exhibition encourage visitors to reflect on artists’ unique ability to help us integrate our physical surroundings into our intellectual, creative and cultural growth, as individuals and communities. Artists who depict landscapes give more to us than images of places frozen at particular moments. Through their labours, a place becomes not just something we move through for practical purposes, but a place we live in imaginatively. The 13 fine artists in *Landscape Tells the Way* have offered the inhabitants of the Illawarra an enhanced conceptual life within their place; an expanded consciousness of its colours and topography; a mature kind of pride in living here.

Dr Sarah Engledow

Suzanne Archer



Image (left): *Beachcombing South Coast*, 2023, oil on canvas final.
 Image (top right): *Beachcombing South Coast*, 2023, oil on canvas, 198x204cm.
 Image (bottom right): *Reflection*, 2023, oil and wax on canvas, 229x368cm.
 Courtesy Nanda\Hobbs, Sydney.

Sophie Cape



Image (above): *Untitled (South View)*, ink, acrylic, charcoal and soil on canvas, private collection, 80x80cm.

Image (top right): *Rivers of coal and iron*, charcoal, graphite and ash on canvas, 170x220cm.

Image (bottom right): *Untitled (South View 2)*, ink, acrylic, charcoal and soil on canvas, private collection, 80x80cm.
Courtesy Olsen Gallery, Sydney.



Elisabeth Cumming



Image (above): *Small Mountain*, 2019, gouche on paper, 24x32cm.
Image (top right): *Rain Forest Mt Kembla*, 37x29cm.
Image (bottom right): *Puckey's Lagoon*, 37x29cm.
Courtesy King Street Gallery on William, NSW.

Warwick
Keen



Image: *Country*, 2023, acrylic on canvas, 100cmx100cm.



Image: *Town*, 2023, acrylic on canvas, 100cmx100cm.

Euan Macleod



Image (above): *Coalcliff*, acrylic on canvas, 58x38cm.

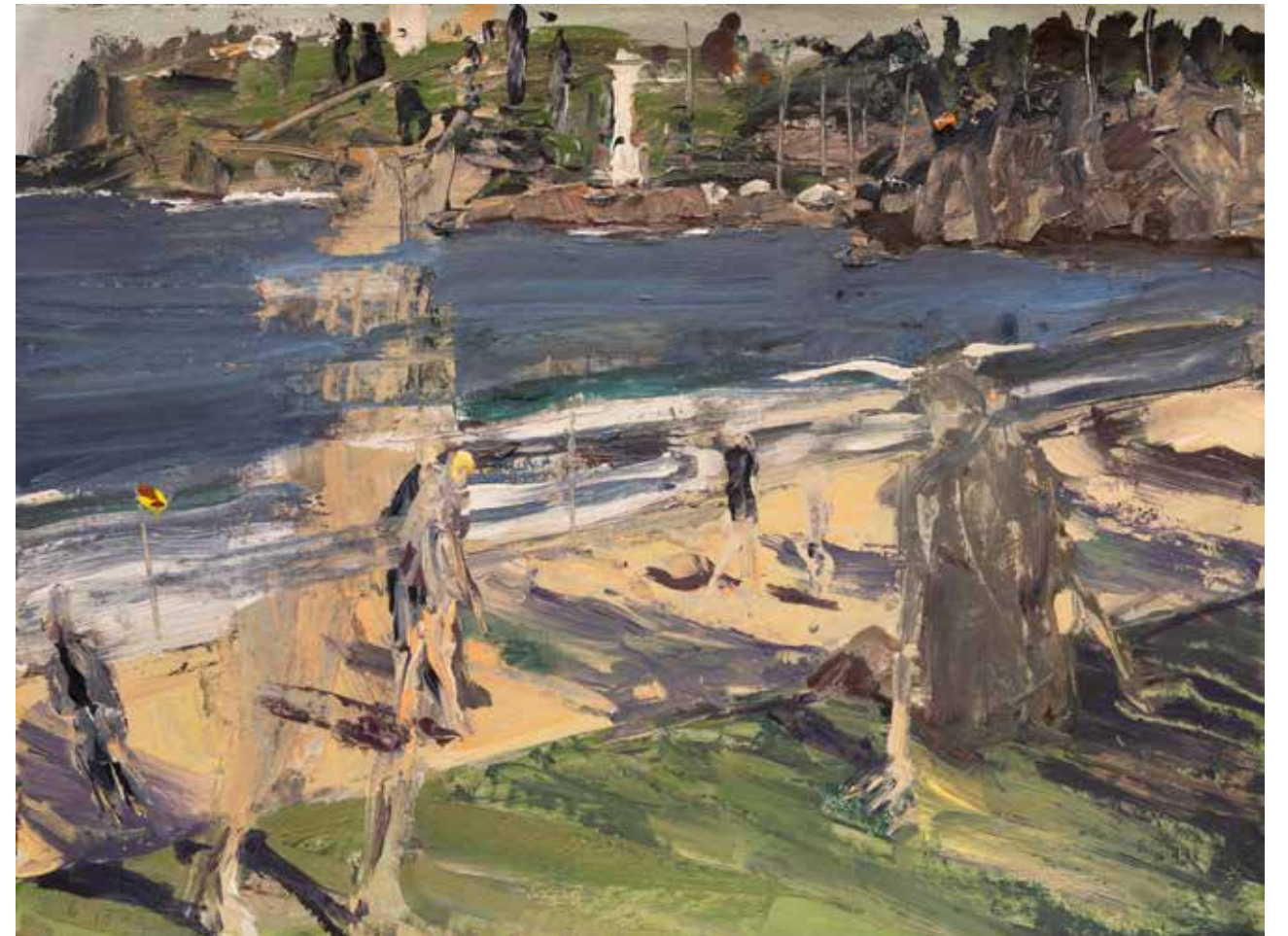


Image (top right): *Above Wollongong Beach*, acrylic on canvas, 58x38cm.



Image (bottom right): *South Coast Beach Couple*, acrylic on canvas, 58x38cm.
Courtesy King Street Gallery on William, NSW.



Steve Lopes

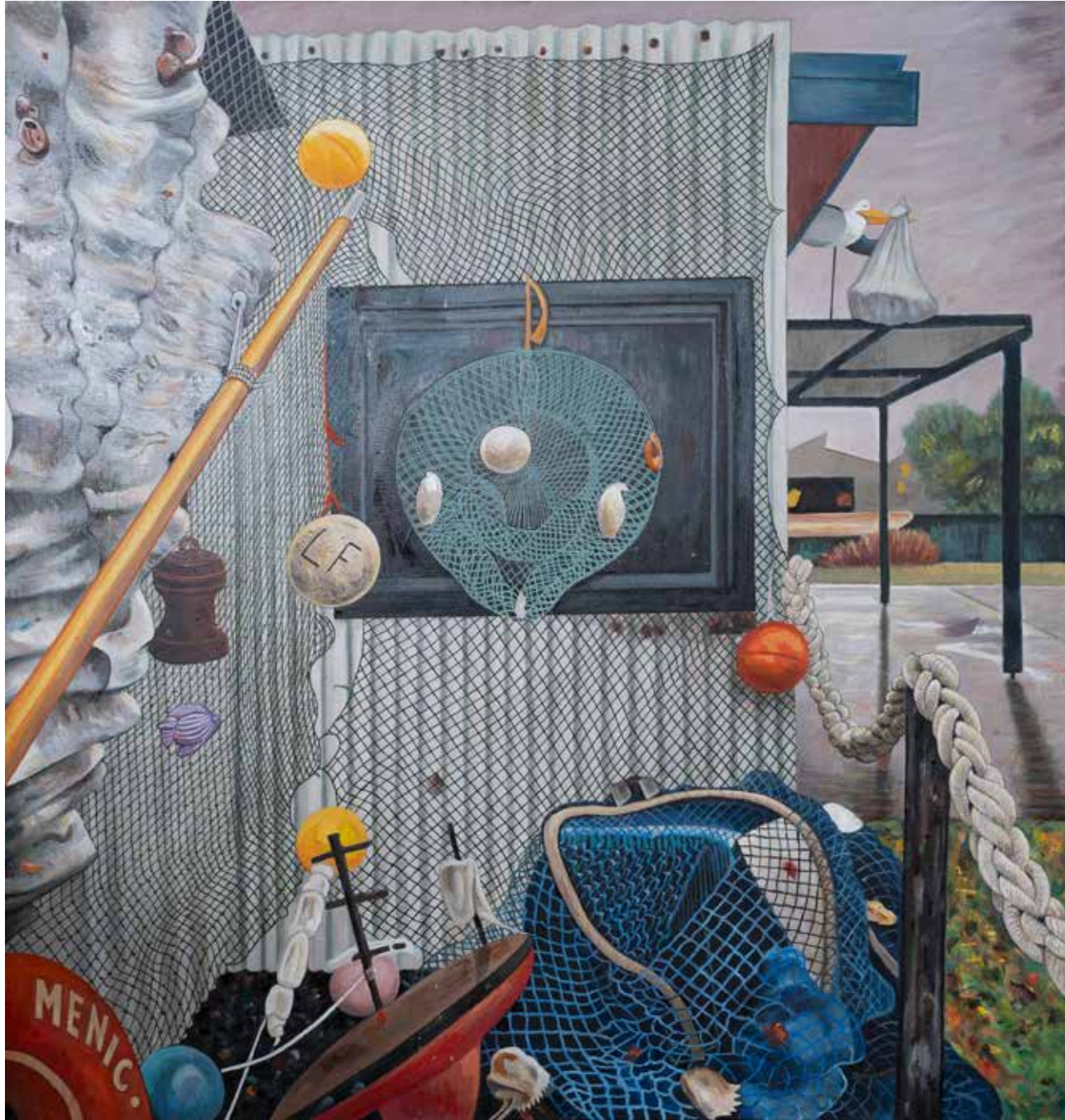


Image (above): *Fisherman's Shack South Coast*, oil on canvas, 121x137cm.
 Image (top right): *The Little Blowhole*, oil on canvas, 140x140cm.
 Image (bottom right): *Kiama*, 56x47cm.
 Courtesy Mitchell Fine Art Gallery, Brisbane and Linton and Kay Galleries, WA.



Jo Lyons

ILLAWARRA MIRROR

Geera, Mount Keira

You pore over the ancient
tree trunks where sunlight
should pour in but the canopy
shields the forest floor. I trace

the path of the treecreeper bird
hopping along the trunks for sap
and insects before swooping over
my head and across the valley.

You dreamt of flight from
the top of this mountain;
I feared flames burning down
the escarpment to home.

We watch the light, the lines,
the angles; we follow the roots
like massive veins and see where
they fall from branches

or diagonal trunks and hang
in space, aiming for the ground
but not quite reaching yet.

From the summit we gaze

down at the tiny container ships
in port where we'd stood last night
and they'd towered over us, where
we'd watched trucks dump slag

into giant containers one by one
in the slow parade of humming
engines and glowing red brake lights,
while the mountain looked down on us.

Jo Lyons, *Fire Flowers* 2023



Image: *The Drought, Cordeaux Dam*, 2014, pastel on paper, 53x71cm.

Noel McKenna



Image (above): *Home, Thirroul*, 2023, oil on plywood, 40x40cm.
Image (top right): *Port Kembla*, 2023, oil on canvas, 38x45.5cm.
Image (bottom right): *Dapto Greyhounds*, 2023, oil on plywood 40x40cm.
Courtesy Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney.



Reg Mombassa

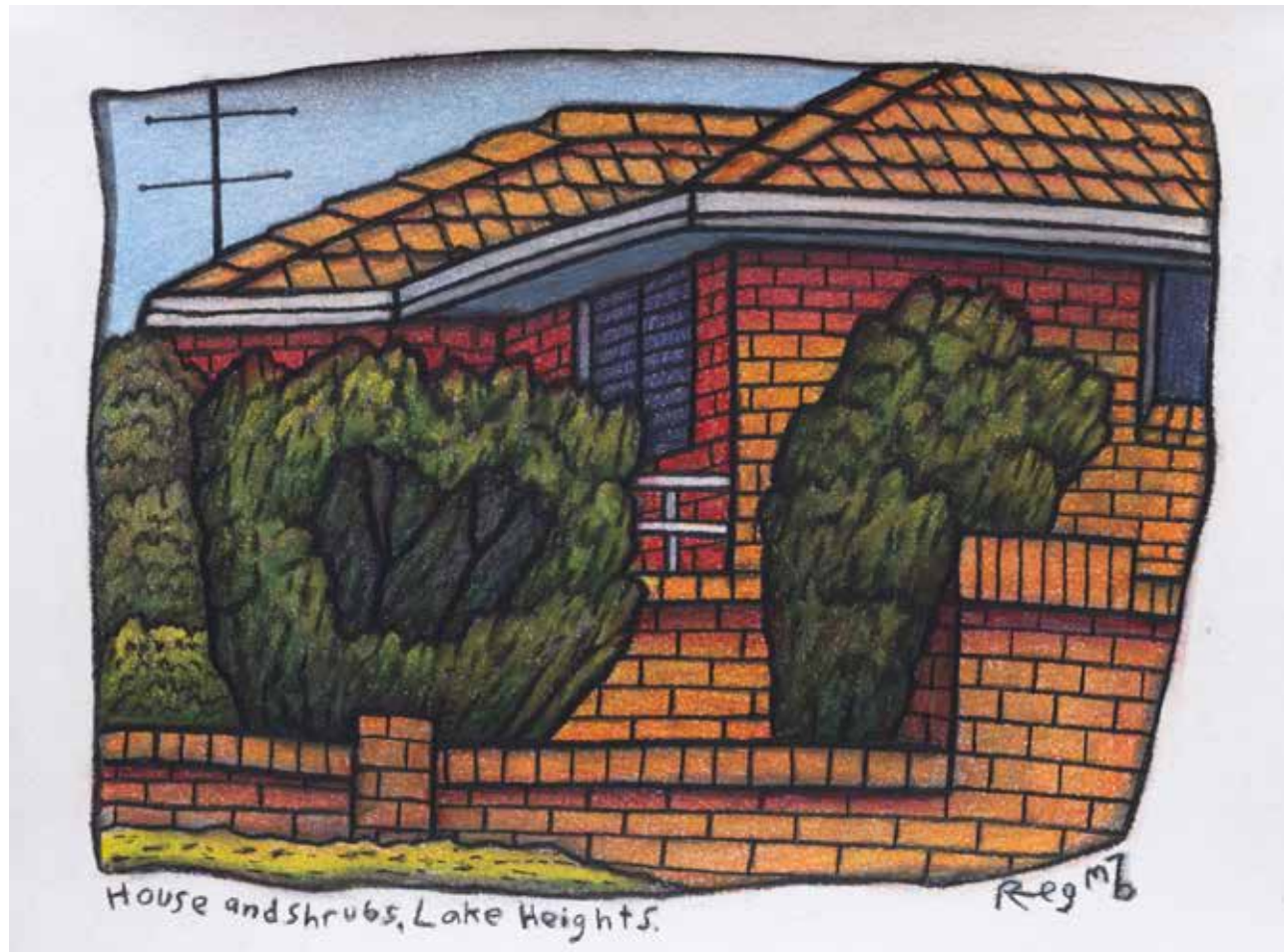
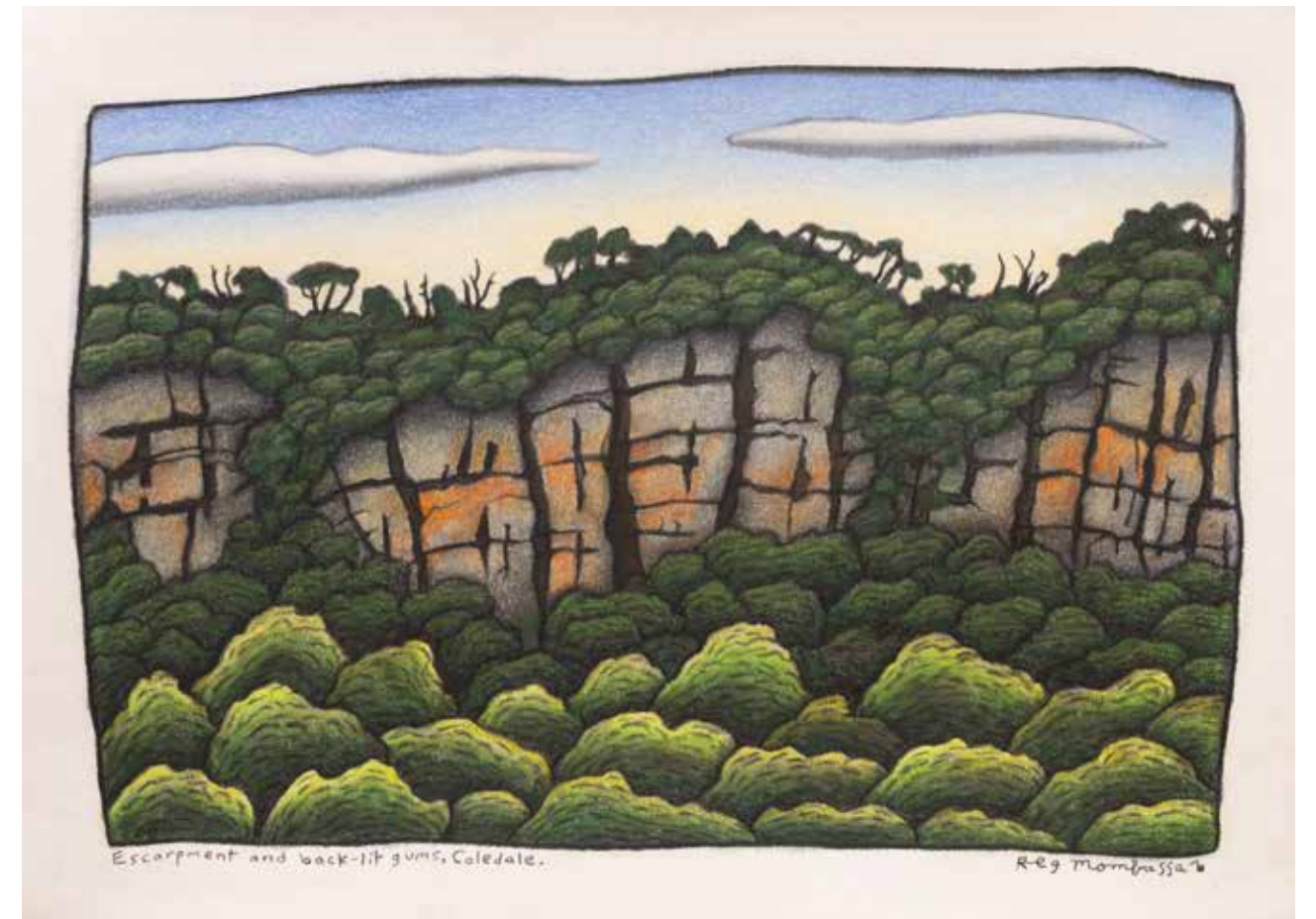


Image (above): *House and Shrubs Lake Heights*, charcoal and coloured pencil on paper.

Image (top right): *Escarpment and Back-lit gums, Coledale*, charcoal and coloured pencil on paper.

Image (bottom right): *An Australian Robot inspects the Port Kembla Steelworks*, charcoal and coloured pencil on paper.
Courtesy Rogue Pop-Up-Gallery, NSW.



Riste
Andrievski



Image (above): *The Cloud above us*, 2024, pigment print, 70x65cm.
Image (top right): *Mt Keira*, 2024, pigment print, 196x138cm.
Image (bottom right): *Steel Escarpment*, 2024, pigment print, 197x131cm.



Idris Murphy



Image (above): *Waves*, acrylic on board, 50x45cm.

Image (top right): *South coast tree*, acrylic on board, 36x28cm.

Image (bottom right): *Star Sailing*, acrylic on board, 46x45cm.

Courtesy King Street Gallery on William, NSW and Mitchell Fine Art Gallery, Brisbane.



Lucy O'Doherty



Image (above): *Purple house*, soft pastel on paper, 50x79cm.
 Image (top right): *Stormy Afternoon*, oil on canvas, 50x70cm.
 Image (bottom right): *Moonfall Lagoon*, soft pastel on paper, 53x79cm.
 Courtesy Jhana Millers Gallery, NSW.



Amanda Penrose Hart



Image (above): *Wollongong Sheds*, 2023, oil on canvas, 110x150cm.
Image (top right): *Puckey's Lagoon with Pines*, 2023, oil on board, 30x30cm.
Image (bottom right): *The Road South*, 2023, acrylic on linen, 100x245cm.
Courtesy King Street Gallery on William, NSW.
Photography by Michael Bradfield.



EAGLES' DANCE

Seacliff Bridge

What would it feel like
to float together on the wind,

soaring with slow deep beats
of the wing on warm currents

of air, whirling us away from
the world we know—

or think we do—to one
where we can always be

our true feathered selves,
soft and light, dipping

and diving, circling each
other in the climb to new

heights, weaving invisible
patterns through the sky

beyond anyone else's reading,
taking turns to guide the other

ever higher, further, forever
switching places,

I lead you follow now
you lead I follow

in a constant dance
among the clouds

Jo Lyons, *Fire Flowers* 2023

Landscape Tells the Way Illawarra

9 March - 2 June 2024, Wollongong Art Gallery

Photography by Riste Andrievski.

Cover image: Riste Andrievski, *Mt Keira*, photograph ink jet print, 102x71cm.

Image (pages 20 and 21): Conrad Martens, *Mullet Creek, Illawarra*, 1853, watercolour, gouache, gum arabic, pencil on paper, 30x43cm. The George and Nerissa Johnson Memorial Bequest, purchased 1992.

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