

IVAN DURRANT

BARRIER DRAW

ARTWORK LABELS

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Introduction

By his own admission, in the early part of his career Ivan Durrant relished the controversy his work raised in the media and deliberately played to the attention. He was dubbed 'Ivan the Terrible' by some in the press for his at times shocking performances and contentious works. His motivation, however, was, not simply to create a stir but rather to use art and performance to make a social statement. Durrant is inspired by the potency of art – over and above other forms of expression – to elicit emotional responses and reactions. In his words, 'visual images do not merely replace words but do things that words cannot do'.

Ivan Durrant: Barrier Draw traces the evolution of Durrant's extraordinarily diverse artistic career. It presents his earliest folk paintings made in response to his childhood experiences of country life; the realist paintings, short films and sculptures of the 1970s and 1980s, including his popular racetrack and movie star series; his controversial and politically motivated performance works; and his evocative 'soft-focus' shed, football and racing paintings of the 1990s and 2000s. The exhibition reveals an artist whose practice is dynamic and wideranging, and whose works remain richly enigmatic in both content and technique.

Ivan Durrant was born in Melbourne in 1947. He was the second of seven children and the eldest son. For the first five years of his life Durrant lived with his family at Camp Pell, a military barracks at Royal Park in Melbourne's inner north that was repurposed as temporary accommodation for migrants and others after the Second World War. Camp Pell was an oppressive environment where families lived in high density and in poor conditions.

The family left Camp Pell in 1952 and moved to Gippsland – first to Newborough, then to Traralgon. Durrant's parents separated in 1954, when he was seven. His mother struggled to cope on her own and was forced to place his two youngest siblings in a children's home. Durrant and his four remaining siblings were moved to Melbourne Orphanage, where he remained for the next eight years.

Durrant had developed an interest in drawing and painting, and his abilities in these areas were something he was recognised for and proud of. He was regularly called upon by his mates at the orphanage to assist them in drawing for their homework. The highlights of this time were occasional holiday billets to a farm at Wangaratta, in north-east Victoria. These experiences provided inspiration for his first series of paintings, which he began in the late 1960s.

In April 1970 Durrant held his first solo exhibition, which he titled *The Country Family at Tolarno Galleries*, St Kilda, in 1970. Reflecting his childhood experiences the paintings were, in Durrant's words, 'happy memories I wanted to be true'. One of the paintings in this exhibition, *Feeding*, 1970, depicts a boy in a blue jumper and shorts spreading seed within an aviary. The door is open with several pigeons inside and others outside, returning after having been allowed to fly free.

All works in *The Country Family* exhibition sold on the first night, and the following day with the proceeds Durrant bought a horse that he named Gadshill. Since his childhood experiences of farm life, he had held a desire to own a horse. The care and training of Gadshill became his focus, and his affection and interest in horses has remained constant throughout his career.

Durrant exhibited with Tolarno Galleries again in 1971. *Single Animals* opened on 14 March 1971 and was as successful as his first exhibition, with all works again selling on the opening night. In Durrant's next exhibition, *Recent Paintings – Flinders Horses and Landscapes*, which opened in March 1972, Durrant's subjects were drawn more from his recent experiences than those of his childhood.

In 1973 Durrant's painting changed dramatically from a naive style to realism. He had recently returned to Melbourne from Flinders on the Mornington Peninsula and, with his brother Ken, established a restaurant called The Pancake Zoo, in Fitzroy Street, St Kilda. This change in environment inspired a new approach to his practice. 'My surreal view of life grew rapidly', Durrant recalled, adding that the colourful nightlife of St Kilda 'set the inspiration for the next couple of years'.

Durrant's *Recent Paintings: Unreal Realism* exhibition opened in June 1973. The exhibition included paintings of racetrack subjects, doll torsos and images of women from magazine photographs. These works were deliberately intended to blur the line between a photographic reproduction and a surreal invention. In Durrant's words, 'sources were combined to confuse the viewer's awareness'.

Building on the concept of 'unreal realism', Durrant became increasingly interested in the role photographic images played in the mass media and people's perception of truth and reality. Combining this with his interest in the notion of creating propaganda, Durrant conceived a succession of art events, or 'happenings', in the mid 1970s, where he could deliberately use the media as part of the artistic process.

During Durrant's younger years, while working in an abattoir to fund his university costs, Durrant was intrigued by the negative responses he received when he told people what he did for a job. He was struck by an apparent double standard, whereby people had no problem buying, cooking and eating meat, but could not acknowledge or accept the reality of where it came from – the killing of animals.

He wanted to draw attention to this hypocrisy but found it difficult to paint the full effect of an animal being slaughtered. Instead, Durrant decided to stage a performance, his infamous *Slaughtered cow happening* of 1975, when the artist dumped a cow carcass outside the National Gallery of Victoria on St Kilda Road.

Durrant's *Slaughtered cow happening* was widely reported in the media and, in general, denounced by the arts establishment – a statement from the NGV in Melbourne's *The Sun* described it as a 'sick and disgusting act'. It marked the beginning of an uneasy relationship between Durrant and some major cultural institutions that lasted for the next three decades.

A month after *Slaughtered cow happening*, Durrant staged another event, *Severed hand happening*, using his 1975 sculpture *Severed hand*, and again the media were a key part of the work and it achieved widespread publicity.

Durrant's interest in horses and cattle, and farm life in general, has been constant throughout his life and regularly crosses over into his art. In 1981 he moved with his family from Brighton to a farm in Nar Nar Goon in Gippsland, south-east of Melbourne. Eight years later Durrant moved again, this time to Benalla in Victoria's north-east. The location provided him with ample space for his studio, and land on which he could raise cattle. He was also drawn to this location, in his words, because of the 'unique north-east light and the sheds'.

In 1987 Durrant began a series of shed interiors, which he continued for more than a decade. Photorealist in style, the dark, womb-like interiors with penetrating shafts of daylight were painted from a combination of imagination and observed reality.

From 2000 Durrant revisited cows as subjects for his paintings. To begin with, these were painted as photorealistic portraits; however, by 2002 his technique evolved into what he refers to as 'supraphotolism'. Painted using a similar method to his photorealist works, with brushes and synthetic polymer paint, the content in these paintings appears to be made up of abstract forms at first; however, when viewed from a distance these forms resolve to reveal a realistic but soft-focus image. Durrant has continued to explore this method in his more recent series of racing and football paintings, and in his landscape paintings of Lake Mokoan, in northern Victoria.

Reflecting on Durrant's extraordinarily active and at times provocative career, it is reasonable to infer he has mellowed in recent years. While he may no longer be 'Ivan the Terrible', he continues to offer a unique perspective on the world around us, and to challenge our perceptions both visually and ethically. Durrant's most recent work, *The slaughtered cow*, 2019, harks back to his 1975 *Slaughtered cow happening*. This new work proves that while Durrant may have softened, he still has the power to use art to shock and jolt us out of our complacency.

Ivan Durrant

Australia born 1947

The cocky

1969

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Cow in the garden

1969

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

'Up to the age of five I lived in Camp Pell: Melbourne's worst slum. I have vivid memories of my father starting domestic fights and drunken street brawls almost every night. Slightly built, he was like a deluded Chihuahua, thinking he was still a wolf taking on the world. Called in by me, my uncles would calm him down. My favourite, Uncle Jim, helped me plant a small vegetable garden behind our hut. I watered it every morning: after four days my precious radishes appeared. My biggest task was guarding them from being trampled by drunken soldiers or scavenging dogs.'

Fruit bowl

1969

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

The shadow

1969

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

The apple

1970

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

'Left alone, I loved milking cows on dairy farms during the Christmas holidays, aged thirteen to fifteen. If I could only ask the cows why it was they looked so content with their monotonous routine of twice a day, every day, in and out of the milking shed, then only a salad of green grass to eat. Here I'm offering them an apple, placed on a doily as if it's a treasure or a trophy. But I'm always frustrated by our language barrier, symbolised by the window glass: me on the inside and my gentle black-and-white beauty outside.'

Blue hills, pink tits

1970

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

'I painted *Blue hills, pink tits* the first night after our daughter Jacqueline was born. Full of excitement, joy and love, I was so taken by how harmonious feeding time was: gentle squeaks from our baby and soft, comforting bonding murmurs from her new mother. This scene became a black-and-white cattle dog full of milk; her 'motherness' echoed in the milky snow-capped hills in the background. Most cattle dogs I'd seen slept in a cold rusted-out drum, so I built this new mother a wooden kennel with a view.'

Blue tank

1970

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Cow jacket

1970

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

‘No longer a ward of the state, I lived with an export-butcher family during my matriculation year, working part-time in their abattoirs. How I hated killing cows, especially the gentle dairy ones. The guilt has never left me and never will. *Cow jacket* is my open admission of slaughtering cows and a prompt to lay some guilt on all of us for taking advantage of, and killing, these helpless creatures.’

Eyes like golden syrup

1970

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Feeding

1970

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

‘When I was aged seven, my mother placed me in an orphanage. The slop bins often had pigeons stuck and drowning in the stinking gravy, so I built a cage and saved as many as I could. What joy when they had babies; I’d even sneak out of the dormitory at night to sit in the cage with them. One morning I took the risk and let the grown babies out – they came back, just as I’d hoped. As a nine-year-old, I felt so proud that I’d built them a safe home, where they were free to come and go.’

Flooded cows

1970

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Jack Frost and the cow

1970

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Jack Frost in the stream

1970

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Milky Way

1970

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Window

1970

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

11a.m., Flinders

1971

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Blue dog, red drum

1971

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Caterpillar tree, Flinders

1971

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

The colt

1971

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Dapple grey

1971

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

‘General Grant was the most magnificent stallion I’d ever seen, so I always rushed to the Mornington track when he was due to race. Almost pure white, and covered in blue-grey dapples, he looked like a galloping landscape. Driving back to Flinders, for weeks after, no matter where I went, there were no clouds, only General Grants everywhere. No doubt he would have loved the stable I’d built for my [racehorse] Gadshill with the window view to the passing clouds.’

Drive out

1971

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Landscape with sheep

1971

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

‘The accidental yet perfect order of nature constantly amazed me, and no more so than when glancing out of the car window looking at sheep grazing in the winter grasslands around Flinders. No matter how bitter the day, face down, they gorged relentlessly like giant witchetty grubs, always heading in the one direction. It was their placement in the grass, perfect every time, as if they knew the order I wanted them in: the most aesthetically pleasing position on the canvas possible. I’d fallen head over heels in love with nature – there was no improvement needed.’

Morning fog, Red Hill

1971

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Neck and neck

1971

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Night sea, Flinders

1971

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

‘Moving to Flinders seemed bleak and isolating – a new planet where I was limited to what surrounded me. Here’s where I discovered my forte: as a researcher living through the events I painted about, expressing the poetry and mood that clarified my existence. I had to know the world to live in it. In *Night sea, Flinders*, the landscape was modelled from my horse Gadshill’s muscles; the sea, from studying the glowing moonlight bouncing off the ghostly distant waves. No need for van Gogh colours; the bliss was in the mood. I’d finally realised that painting creates moods that words can’t replace.’

Nose hair

1971

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

‘Gadshill was an exceptionally gentle racehorse in spite of his frightening dinosaur size. I always felt a little nervous looking up at his hairy nose and those giant biting teeth. As a treat I’d give him three or four carrots every night. That’s when I noticed the fine hairs on his nose seemed to be growing out of the ends of the carrots; their shape also echoed his bold muscular roundness. It was as if the carrot and horse were the same beast. My time at Flinders was all about the joy of discovering oddness.’

Sand dune

1971

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Ute

1971

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

The red hose

1972

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Blue jockey

1973

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Centaur

1973

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

‘Horses are a pack animal and rely on the boss mare for leadership. Once separated from their herd, they bond easily to their human handler and will walk through fire if asked. If a gap opens up in a race field, a hesitant horse will quickly take it when given a confident prompt by its jockey. At the end of the race, they both share the glory as inseparable units. The horse with its polished coat and athletic build, and the jockey with their colourful sun-shining silks; that’s got to be the closest we’ll ever get to a centaur.’

Floating horse

1973

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

The strapper

1973

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

'In 1973, [my racehorse] Gadshill went off to compete at dressage, while we shifted to Caulfield. Unexpectedly, the nights were so quiet that I found it difficult to sleep. At Flinders, Gadshill's stable backed onto our bedroom, and I'd wake up three or four times a night listening to him get up and down: to drink, chew his carrots, then give a kick. Daily, riding him, hosing him down and brushing him dry, then listening to him every night, I may as well have been a horse. I'm sure he thought he was human anyway – why not just swap our skins?'

Jack Palance

1974

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

‘The more I watched Hollywood movies, the more I felt they were some kind of propaganda, with their perfectly beautiful women and strong, handsome heroes. That started my real interest in using the photographic image as a tool or language in art. To me, for some unexplained reason, if it appeared photographic, then we would believe it, no matter how exaggerated. So I created my own propaganda, painting Jack Palance with deep red skin and hair, and Judy Garland in a wonderfully romantic green. And now even I believe they are this perfect. Unknowingly, I was becoming a photorealist.’

Judy Garland

1974

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Benalla Art Gallery Collection

Purchased with the assistance of the Victorian Regional Galleries Art Foundation
and Advisory Council Fund, 1991.

1991.01

Lauren Bacall

1974

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of Fiona and Frank Stephens.

'Giant flapping eyelashes, ruby red lipstick, painted beauty spots, rouge and party-balloon breasts; strippers and dancers would come in at midnight for their supper to the crepe restaurant run by my brother Toffa and myself. In civvies the next day, they were never recognisable on Fitzroy Street until they said hello. Later at night, I'd watch TV's marketing man, Hal Todd, introduce old black-and-white Hollywood movies, and wondered if these perfect actors were just all make-up as well. So I set out to glamourise them in fake vibrant colours, creating my own showgirls.'

2 Jockeys

1975

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

‘Even with no horse to train, I still retained my trainer’s licence, giving me access to the mounting yard and jockeys’ room. In the rooms there was always tension in the air. These lightly built, smaller-than-average brave souls were about to chance their luck on giant explosive monsters, never knowing if it was their turn to fall, break a bone or worse. Jokes were very few in the rooms, not much chatter either. The only way they appeared to ease their tension was with the fastidious cleaning of gear. I was always glad when they came back safe.’

3 Jockeys

1975

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Glen Eira City Council Art Collection

Caulfield Cup Day

1975

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Jockey's room

1975

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Kirk Douglas

1975

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Seven people in the snow

1975

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Art Collection of the National Australia Bank (231)

‘With my new Pentax camera I headed off to my favourite racetrack, Caulfield. It was a new world with its own rules: jockeys and horses at the top of the hierarchy, desperate punters at the bottom. Littering was not just acceptable, but mandatory. If your horse lost, you just ripped up your ticket and dropped it where you stood. From the grandstand, it was a spectacular sight. Snow, everywhere you looked. I photographed punters and carefully placed them in their own landscape, in positions I preferred. What power, convincingly faking a seemingly real world.’

Severed hand

1975

silicone, cling wrap, plastic

Collection of the artist

A day at the Caulfield races

1976

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

The lady in the leopard skin

1976

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Purchased 1976

76.271

‘On the surface, having a day at the races may sound like entertainment, but that’s not how it appeared to me. There was little to no smiling, laughter, or even conversation; people spent all day looking down at their form guide for the next chance to win, or moping because of their loss. Yet paradoxically, they dressed up as if they were going to a ball or a party. I loved horseracing, but was never a punter, and wondered what drove them to show up and lose week after week; however, with respect, I showed them at their best.’

Mounting yard

1976

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of Michael Ajani

Racing November Melbourne

1976

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Tarrawarra Museum of Art Collection

Gift of Eva Besen AO and Marc Besen AO

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2012

2012.008

Sandown

1976

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Quality meats: chuck steak

1977

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Quality meats, lamb legs

1977

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Quality meats: Pal

1977

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Quality meats: pig's head

1977

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Butcher shop

1977–78

synthetic polymer and enamel paint on composition board and wood, ceramic tiles, transparent synthetic polymer resin, mirror, steel, fluorescent light, plastic, polyvinyl chloride, metal, string

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Mr and Mrs Burdett A. Laycock, 1978

A15.a-l-1978

‘Living in Soho, New York, during 1976 to 1977, and mixing with the great photorealist painters Chuck Close, Janet Fish, Judd Nelson, Jack Beal and Richard Estes, was a life-changing experience, but no match for the greatest show on earth: the Museum of Natural History, where its dioramas stretched for miles. Every blade of grass, twig, leaf, whatever, was made and painted by hand, better than any realist painter could do. Back in Australia, I decided to make my own diorama: *Butcher shop*, where I could finally get the NGV to accept my slaughtered cow, in a sanitised version.’

Gutted rabbit

1980

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

South Australian Government Grant and d'Auvergne Boxall Bequest Fund, 1983

8315P19

'It seems disturbing that I found an extreme close-up of a freshly killed gutted rabbit as a thing of beauty, yet that's what I did. In spite of it reminding me of a crucifix with the back legs of a weightlifter, I was smitten by its wet, glistening muscles, its veins, blood clots, contrasting kidneys and wonderful Impressionist colours. During the making I kept slipping between the horror of slaughter, and the pure joy of painting. Maybe it's a metaphor for our killing of animals for their flesh and skin, and only occasionally feeling the shame.'

Brain

1981

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Meltdown

1981

oil and enamel varnish on synthetic polymer resin, plastic,
composition board

Collection of the artist

Uranium

1981

oil and enamel varnish on synthetic polymer resin, plastic,
composition board

Collection of the artist

War

1981

oil and enamel varnish on synthetic polymer resin, plastic,
composition board

Collection of the artist

Green pen

1988

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

The meter box

1991

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

War

1991

oil and enamel varnish on synthetic polymer resin, plastic

Collection of the artist

‘Not wanting to waste my time on this planet, I’ve always pursued more from art than mere “perfume for the rich”; this is illustrated no more graphically than in the rejected, slaughtered cow at the NGV or the disturbing uranium-affected aborted baby (*Uranium*, 1981). During the first Gulf War in 1991, TV screens bombarded us with grainy green night vision skies and white tracer bullets, sanitising us from the resulting deaths. Regardless of the politics, I felt the need to create some vision of death and slaughter. Whether it had any immediate or future effect is the gamble and risk of commitment.’

Somerset door closed

1992

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Ballarat Art Gallery

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Scheme
by the artist, 2001

2001.6

Somerset door open

1992

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of Emma and Bob House

The wool bench

1994

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

‘It’s only when our genetics, our brains and our feelings come together at the right place, at the right time, does the true poetry and splendour of life resonate. To survive, our ancestors needed shelter: usually a dark cave, a rudimentary bush dwelling or stone house. Protected from the elements and night predators, they could celebrate the next day as the bright morning light broke through gaps, cracks and small glassless window spaces. Sheds are in my family’s DNA; no wonder I felt a strong déjà vu sense of safety and home when entering my first shearing shed.

Big cow's head

1995

oil on composition board

Collection of the artist

Dicker Rd. meter box

1995

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Somerset blue

1996

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Dicker Rd. sheep floor

1997

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Somerset meter box

1997

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Delatite feed room

1998

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Private collection, Mansfield

‘Mansfield on the Delatite River: what a rush as I opened the cracked-peeling-paint door and glanced inside a 150-year-old shearing shed. It was an edgy moment, a moment between being awake and asleep, where my eyes and brain had to adjust. Peering and straining through the black cave-like interior as the warm red and fire-glowing yellow seeped through the darkness, I stepped forward. Comforted by the padded luxurious quilt of dry hay on the floor, and wrapped by the kindness of brick and stone walls, I’d found the womb I’d been looking for.’

Sheep pen

1998

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of Jo Lane and Peter Houghton

Summer Benalla

1998

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Blue stones

2000

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Private collection, Melbourne

Two and a bit cows

2000

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Angus cow

2001

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

'I walked into the Benalla cattle yards, up close to an Angus cow staring back. It was just like a shearing shed: dark, with reflected colour defining its structure. What got me in, was how every hair on its face reflected the summer blue sky; it had to be painted. My only problem in the studio was the left eye in the painting had disappeared in complete shadow. I took a punt and created the sense of an eyeball by painting a simple half circle of reflected blue and fawn. It worked. Still, the best line I've ever painted.'

Before death

2001

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Blood red 1

2001

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Blood red 2

2001

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Blood red 3

2001

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Rainbow cowboy

2001

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

'I've painted cows for over fifty years, moulded by the joy I felt milking them as a young boy. The mutual connection I felt with them was no doubt more one-sided than I believed, but I can't and don't want to shake it off. These paintings are made with love and kindness, paying homage to these beautiful creatures that I owe so much to. Sadly, and unknowingly, they give us everything with no return in the end. So here they are, waiting for slaughter, so soft and inoffensive, and still offering us all the colours in the rainbow.'

Three red ear tags

2001

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Yellow cow

2001

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Blue polls

2002

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Friesians

2002

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Full pen

2003

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Pies and Doggies

2006

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

'As I got closer and closer to the MCG, the crowd got thicker and thicker; my adrenalin started pumping. Footy records being sold, vendors spruiking, coloured scarves and the odd cry, 'Carn the Pies!'. There's something joyous in belonging to a group and not individually being known to each other, but worshipping the same team, symbolised by its colours. For years I have tried to evoke feeling, mood, emotion and passion through the use of colour, but nothing in my opinion evokes a greater response than the sight of your team's colours running into the MCG and through the banner.'

Swans huddle

2007

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

‘Football games allow us to respect the individual by sharing their mind space, where we concentrate, through a community effort, on the dedication of our team – a sort-of group love-in. The stranger sitting next to me will offer me a chip, get me a coffee – his shout – and defend my seat with his life if I need a piss. These works glorify the visions of these magnificent barrackers. Painted in an out-of-focus semi-abstract manner, to eliminate individual players and concentrate on the team colours where the emotion is greatest.’

Anzac match, M.C.G.

2008

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Fallen Anzac

2008

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Ball carrier

2009

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Power and passion

2010

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Goggles

2012

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Mounting yard

2012

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

White shadow roll

2014

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Sprint

2013

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

‘Why I bought my first racehorse in 1970, and still love those glorious shiny specimens of explosive muscle, stems from the sighting of Star of Heaven, a stallion standing at Angus Armanasco’s Sandown Lodge at Springvale in 1969 – I had a paddock full of cows next door. A stud groom led this dancing and snorting, bull-crested stallion to the serving barn where his ladies were waiting. I imagine even being close up to a herd of wild elephants couldn’t live up to my fear and excitement watching this spring-loaded glistening chestnut – a true painting-in-waiting.’

By five lengths

2014

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

'TV race finishes with head-on close-ups – views not achievable at the races or even in the race – provide what I look for. I'm still the observer, glorifying the combination of man and animal. Being so zoomed in gives the viewer of my paintings a real sense of startled wonder, drive, thrust and risk-taking – a new experience, like travelling on the ghost train with Disneyland river caves thrown in. Combining all this into an out-of-focus final image unites the paintings and therefore the world into a glorious jewel-like colour and light-flooded universe.'

Lime silks

2014

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Diamonds

2015

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

White bridle

2015

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Ripples

2016

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

River red gum

2016

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Spring

2016

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

‘Working on dairy farms during the Christmas holidays, I loved discovering that the black-and-white cows had the same colours as my football team, Collingwood. How magical their upside-down reflection looked in the freshly irrigated paddocks. When fishing at Lake Mokoan, the drowned forest of gumtrees in this artificial lake looked exactly like my cows. Of course, it takes a little imagination and blurring your eyes – no problem to me. Going back recently, the lake had been drained, and my cows had disappeared leaving grey dead trees in a dried mud paddock, so I painted them back.’

Sunset

2016

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Night light

2017

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

Studio

2017–19

synthetic polymer paint on composition board
(18 panels)

Collection of the artist

‘I’m not sure if there’s any purpose of being on this earth, but I’m convinced art makes living better. Why be a half-glass-full person, when you can opt for two buckets full? My studio table is piled up with random pots of paint, tubes, brushes, jars and paper-plate palettes. At a glance, mundane, but through my eyes it’s a joyous blur of brilliant light and colour. I once saw everything in twenty-twenty vision, but now view the world in out-of-focus magic, turning my table into a giant collection of the world’s best opals.’

Cumbungi

2018

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

'I am hooked on colour and light. At five years old I collected caterpillars from the primary school's peppercorn tree. To this day, the yellow, lime-green and brilliant grass-green and stippled-mauve spots on this plump intestine-shaped creature is sharp in my mind. At the Olympic Games in 1956, I saw for the first time an African runner and was mesmerised by the gold-bronze light shimmering from his thighs, his shaded areas a deep purple. Light and colour have always held a fascination for me. It seemed inevitable: there's no way I could go past Lake Mokoan without one day painting it.'

Water reeds

2018

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection of the artist

The slaughtered cow

2019

synthetic polymer paint and synthetic resin on polystyrene

Collection of the artist