



The Artist's Garden: *Humanising the Landscape*

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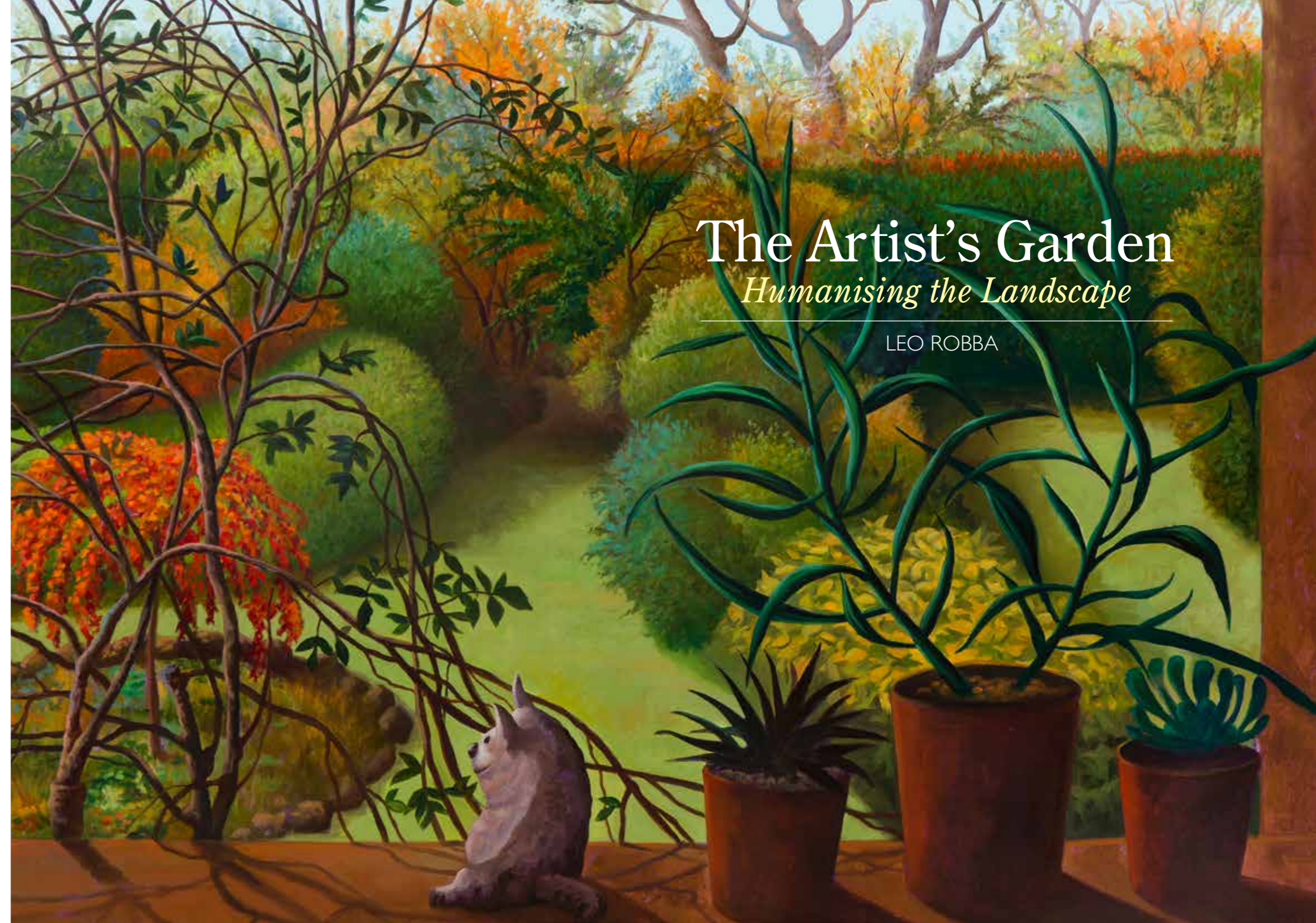
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THE ARTIST'S GARDEN: Humanising the Landscape

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The Artist's Garden

Humanising the Landscape

LEO ROBBA



Vegetable garden, Springwood
November, 2012

The Artist's Garden

Humanising the Landscape

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Floral bloom - The Sunken Garden, Kensington Palace, September, 2011

Introduction

This selection of paintings was produced between, 2010 - 2015 and celebrates the artist's garden tradition and explores not just my love gardens and landscape but many of the formal aspects and distinctive features of garden culture. I have painted and researched many different types of gardens including Tudor gardens, knot gardens, parterre gardens, picturesque parkscapes – as well as the evolution of the various forms of the pictorial representations of the extended garden tradition. And whilst I have painted many different gardens in extremely different places my main focus throughout this time has been an exploration of the relationship I have with my own garden and the physical and metaphysical parallels that exist between gardening and painting. There is something wonderful about getting to know a place through painting it. It is quite a different experience than simply visiting or traveling through somewhere. My understanding is that you get to know certain features in a much more concentrated way. You experience those features that you choose to focus on rather than an overall and often superficial sense of what you see. The other great aspect of painting as you move through life is that you have a physical record of those experiences.



I'm attracted to the strange things that people do to plants ... this left me to question; is that a boxed hedge or a hedge in a box

In *The Garden of Ideas*, Richard Aitken expresses the notion that “gardens have a profound significance to humankind. They have universal values as repositories of cultivated plants, maintained using the skills of horticulture and order through diverse processes bound by tradition and innovation”. Those words – diverse processes bound by tradition and innovation – directly mirror what I understand the act of painting to be, which could also be characterised as an exploration of the tension that always exists within painting between tradition and innovation. This tension (which also exists in garden practice), whether that is the physical endeavour or the material quality, is often re-



Three garden in Istanbul:
 Left: An Islamic garden which is playfull, open to the public and a symbol of our reliance on the natural world as a provider of life.
 Centre: An easy care plastic hedge glued to a nine-storey building in the city.
 Right: A small sacred garden, kept and cared-for inside an ancient walled mosque.



In the studio in 2011 with my painting 'A View of the Artist's Garden, Hillston' ... my homage to John Glover

solved by challenging the various processes involved in producing a painting, trying something different or taking account of the historical precedence. The good thing is that knowledge is shared and passed on and our understanding of tradition and culture is enhanced.

When viewing these paintings I believe it may be helpful to have an understanding of some of the practical considerations of my approach to painting. As an artist, I have gone out into the landscape (garden) and painted en plein air my version of what was there. By painting flowering bushes, trees and the various forms of a garden directly from life I have sort to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of my subject. I have done this by looking, by considering what is seen, and by painting my response, to that experience. It has always been my intention, not to make a painting of a particular place but to try to make a painting of an experience of that place. Everyday, sometimes several times a day I will walk through my garden in Sprigwood, checking the health of plants, growth patterns or to plan what needs to be done, and time frame in which I feel I can do what's needed. This act of constant looking, thinking about what needs to be cut back or reshaped, watered or cared for flows directly into how I see images and the way I paint. It is built into the way I live and the way I see the world.

As a general introduction to these paintings it may also be helpful to know that there has been several key artists that I studied in depth throughout this period; three of those artists are, the English artist Stanley Spencer, the colonial artist John Glover and the German Romantic painter Casper David Friedrich. The compositional complexities, the heightened atmospherics and the metaphoric potential on offer in the paintings of these artists is what draws me to them. What is also important is that it is these characteristics (like painting) also exist and are paralleled in gardens a gardening.

By focusing on my garden subject for an extended period of time I have set out to define at least some of the universal qualities of a garden and how they relate to painting and to other parts of my life. This study has been helped by considering the historic development of garden culture and by looking at gardens through eyes of other artists. But most what I hoped to achieve was to come to a better understanding of my connection with gardens and the natural world and to find real meaning in what I see and feel, through painting.

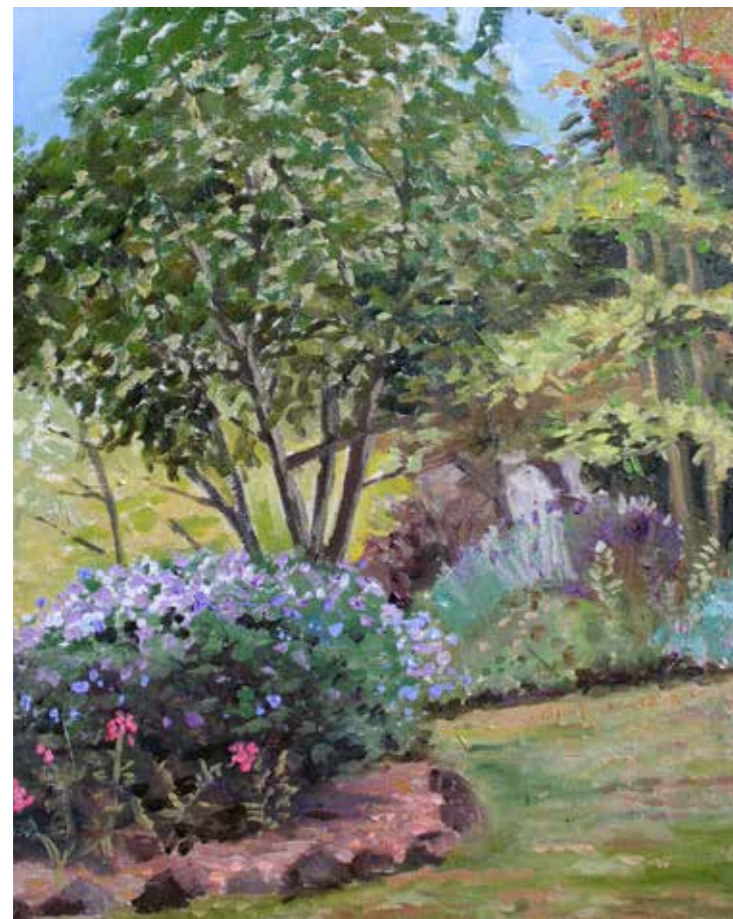
Leo Robba



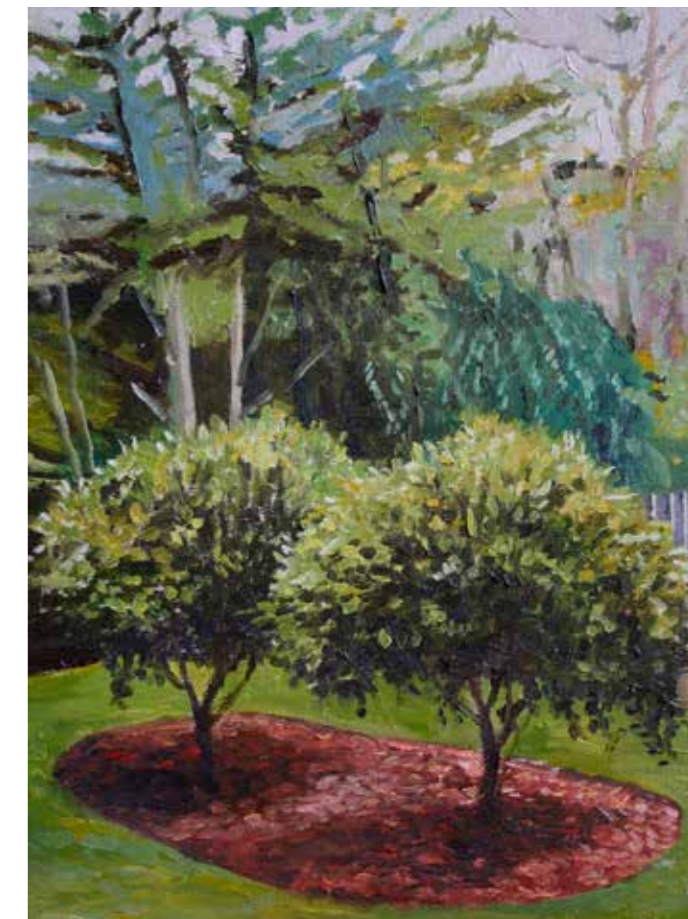
Dogwood in flower at Hillston, Spring, 2014

Bee Farm Rd, Springwood Blue Mountains

My garden in Springwood was begun in 1890 and was originally known as Forrest Home, but is now known these days as Hillston. Once a much larger piece of land it now sits as approximately one and three quarters acres of semi formal garden. It is perched on a ridge above Sassafras Gully which forms part of the World Heritage Blue Mountains National Park. Its current configuration is the result of a slow transformation over the last one hundred and twenty six years by the various owners, their tastes, labour and aspirations. For the first five or six years that I have lived here I have made little change preferring to maintain (and paint) what was already existing. I am now slowly adding to what is here but still feel that while I own this place that I am a temporary custodian moving through. For me there is a sense that the decisions of people past, to plant what they did and where they did deserves respect and to change what they have done must be carefully considered and take account of the gardens histories and the memories it holds. The original and traditional owners of this land are the Dhurag people.



Cherry Tree, Springwood, 2010
30 cm x 20 cm, oil on board



Two Trees, Springwood, 2010
30 cm x 20 cm, oil on board

“Gardens have a profound significance to humankind. They have universal values as repositories of cultivated plants, maintained using the skills of horticulture and order through diverse processes bound by tradition and innovation”

Richard Aitken
The Garden of Ideas

Pepper Tree, Springwood, 2010
30 cm x 20 cm, oil on board





The Kitten Tree, Hillston, 2012
oil on canvas, 52 cm x 38 cm,





Golden Shadows, Hillston, 2012
oil on canvas, 52 cm x 38 cm,

Private Collection

Evening Lavender and Pines, Hillston, 2012
oil on canvas, 52 cm x 38 cm

Private Collection





'Planting a garden is an act of anticipation. It is also an act of memory and settlement: those who make a garden look back to recollected forms and forward to new growth that will become a special kind of place.'

Katie Holmes
Reading the Garden: The Settlement of Australia

Camellia Head, Blue Pool and Shadows, 2013
oil on canvas, 110 cm x 75 cm



“As is the Gardener,
so is the Garden”

Thomas Fuller

Big Autumn, 2013
oil on canvas 138 cm x 360 cm





Dogwood, Before Dark, 2013
oil on canvas, 110 cm x 75 cm

Private Collection



Flowering Dogwood,
Springwood ww



Winter Dogwood, Hillston, 2011,
oil on canvas, 85 cm x 65 cm

“There is a remarkable
peculiarity in the Trees of
this Country ...
however numerous, they
rarely prevent your
tracing through them.”

John Glover

*John McDonald, Art of Australia, Volume I:
Exploration to Federation*

A Different Kind of Eden, Hillston, 2011
oil on canvas, 100 cm x 170 cm





Hedges - Golden, 2011
oil on canvas, 52 cm x 38 cm
Private Collection



“There is a remarkable peculiarity in the Trees of this Country ... however numerous, they rarely prevent your eyes tracing through them.”

John Glover

John McDonald,
Art of Australia, Volume I:
Exploration to Federation



Study, View of the Artist's Garden, Hillston, 2011
oil on canvas, 38 cm x 156 cm

Private Collection



Winter Shadows and Camelias, 2012
oil on canvas, 85 cm x 60 cm



The Pepper Tree,
Springwood, 2012



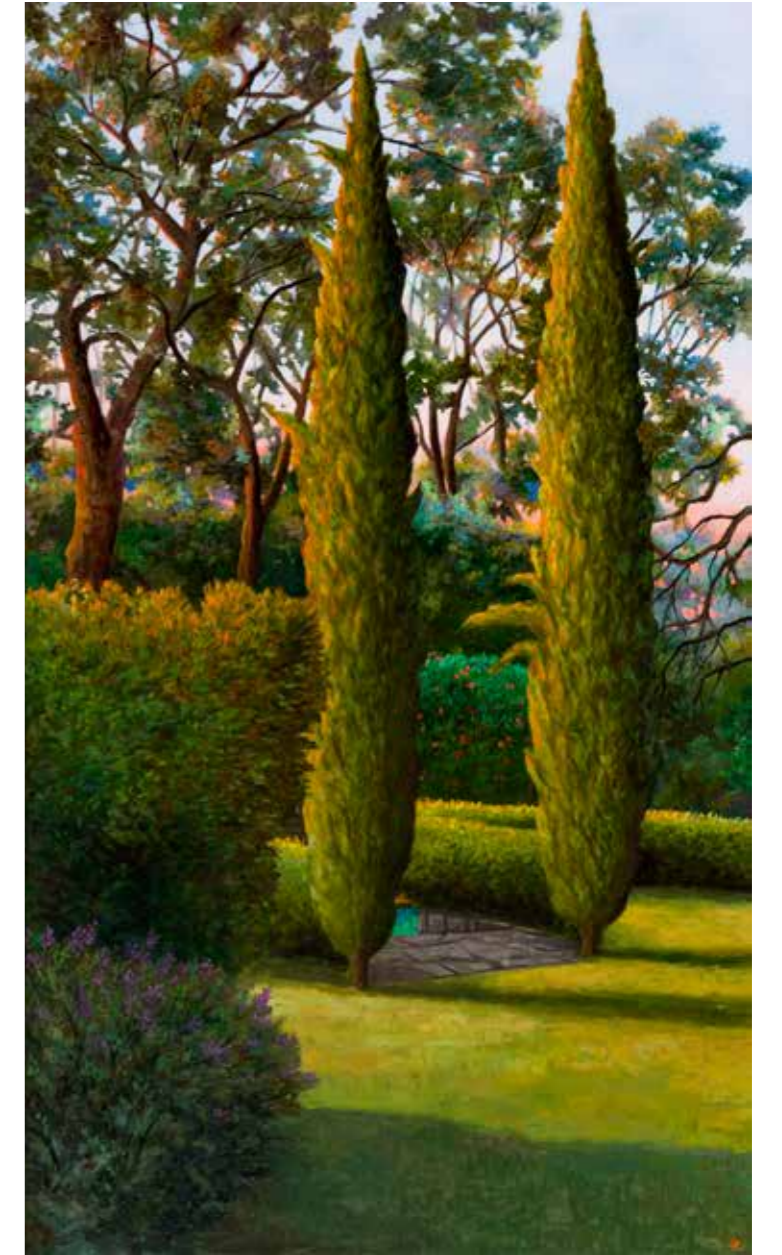
A View of the Artist's Garden, Hillston, 2010 - 2011
oil on canvas, 3 panels, 138 cm X 560 cm
Private Collection



Peper Tree and Shadows, 2011
oil on canvas, 52 cm x 38 cm

Private Collection

Dusk, Looking Through Big Pines, 2012,
oil on canvas, 122 cm x 69 cm





Inside Split View, Hillston, 2012,
oil on canvas, 52 cm x 38 cm
Private Collection

“... the aesthetic of the Picturesque was more than an adjunct or extension to the connoisseurship of painting. While its origins are diffused over half a century and while it has been applied to such diverse practices as picture collecting, landscape gardening and travel, the Picturesque is significant in having developed from, and having resulted in, a coherent body of theory.”

David Hansen
John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque

Two Pines, Lavender, 2011
oil on canvas, 52 cm x 38 cm

Private Collection





Blue Pine, Hillston, 2012,
oil on canvas, 52 cm x 38 cm

Private Collection





“Gardening imparts an organic perspective on the passage of time” and while it can be said that gardens, like paintings, are “humanly created things” it can be said that both in their own way also challenge our perception of time.

William Cowper / Robert Pogue Harrison / Leo Robba

Headdress, Looking Through Shadows, 2013,
oil on canvas, 120 cm x 75 cm

Private Collection

Kingwood Parkland, Western Sydney

I discovered this garden by accident while getting my car serviced and at the time, it struck me as both peculiar and very familiar. I loved its exuberance but also the fact that it seemed so culturally out of place. The parkland which contains this part of the garden and which I have named the ‘Cherry Doughnut’ and the ‘Blossom Boats’ is situated right on the edge of the Great Western Highway. On the opposite side of the highway, no more than twenty metres away is a strip of car yards, service stations and workshops. This garden and the strange manifestation of trees and bushes and what at first seems its inappropriate situation is what drew me to paint it. While I was painting the Cherry trees and shaped hedges I couldn’t help but think, what the council worker’s who were charged with maintaining these strange forms thought of them.



Study for Cherry Doughnut, Kingswood, 2010
acrylic on paper, 21 cm x 29.7 cm

Private Collection

“The cherry tree and doughnut hedge stood out for me as an eccentric feature in an otherwise ordinary parkscape but also expressed personality and a form of figuration. The site and strangeness of the cherry tree and doughnut hedge and the familiar eeriness of the parkland combined to reconnect me with strong memories from my past growing up in Brisbane.”

Leo Robba

Cherry Doughnut, Kingswood, 2011
oil on canvas, 180 cm x 138 cm

Private Collection





Blossom Boat, Kingswood Western Sydney, 2011,
oil on canvas, 38 cm x 52 cm

Private Collection

Blossom Boats, Kingswood, Western Sydney, 2011
oil on canvas, 38 cm x 52 cm



Four Gardens: Newcastle, NSW

Like most gardens the four different gardens I painted in Newcastle owed much of their appearance to their various locations, their purpose and their creators. Foreshore Park is situated on the edge of the working harbour looking across to the grain silos and coal loader. Civic Park is a smaller centrally located formal garden which sits in front of the Newcastle Region Art Gallery and is frequented mainly by office workers eating their lunch or passers-by on their way to somewhere else. King Edward Park offers a great sense of drama as it wraps around the headland. It is a place of BBQ's and ocean views. Like many coastal parks it is intermingled with the traditional Norfolk pines, rockeries and a rotunda. All three of these public gardens are different but special in their own way. The fourth and privately owned garden which I have named Rowan's Garden after its owners could be described as - other worldly. It is a highly manicured formal garden whose individuality, intensity and structure sets it apart from the world and unlike any of the parks once you enter Rowan's Garden your view is restricted to the immediate confines of the garden.

In Shadows, the Foreshore, Newcastle, 2011
oil on canvas, 85 cm x 61 cm





“the creation of gardens is determined by intellectual, social, economic, political and artistic forces, which in turn are mirrored in the garden”

John Dixon Hunt
The Genius of Place: The English Landscape Garden

The Urn, Rowan's Garden, 2011,
acrylic on canvas, 52 cm x 38 cm



Big Pine and Ivy, Rowan's Garden, 2011,
acrylic on canvas, 40 cm x 30 cm

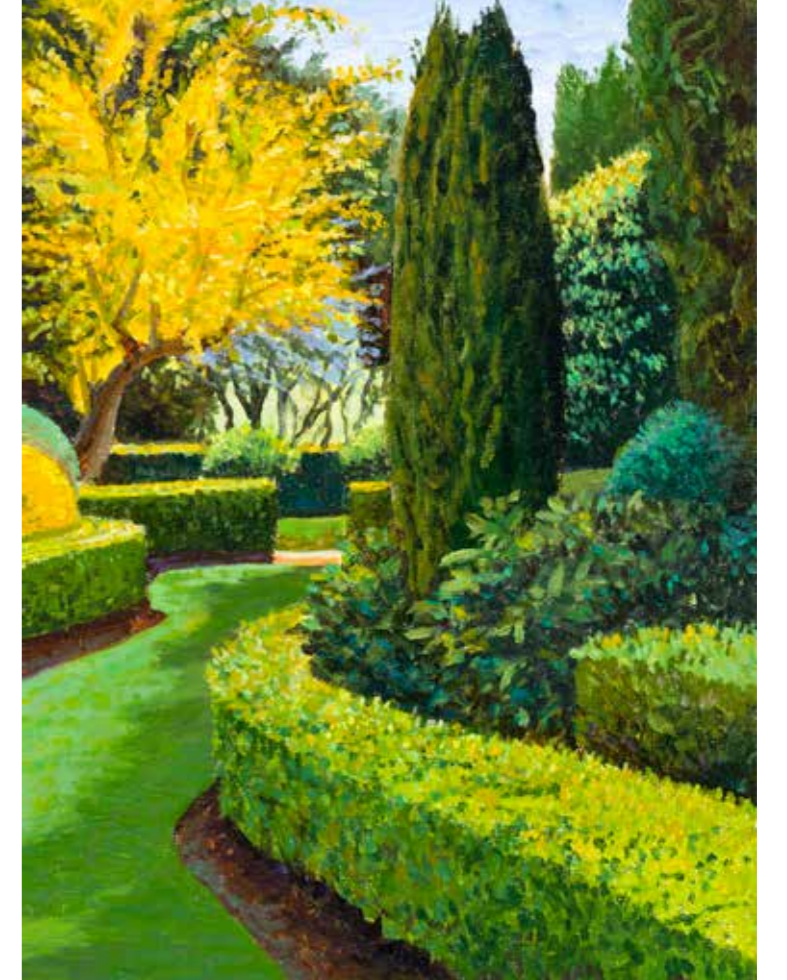


Four Pines, Rowan's Garden, 2011
acrylic on canvas, 40 cm x 30 cm

“all gardening is landscape painting”

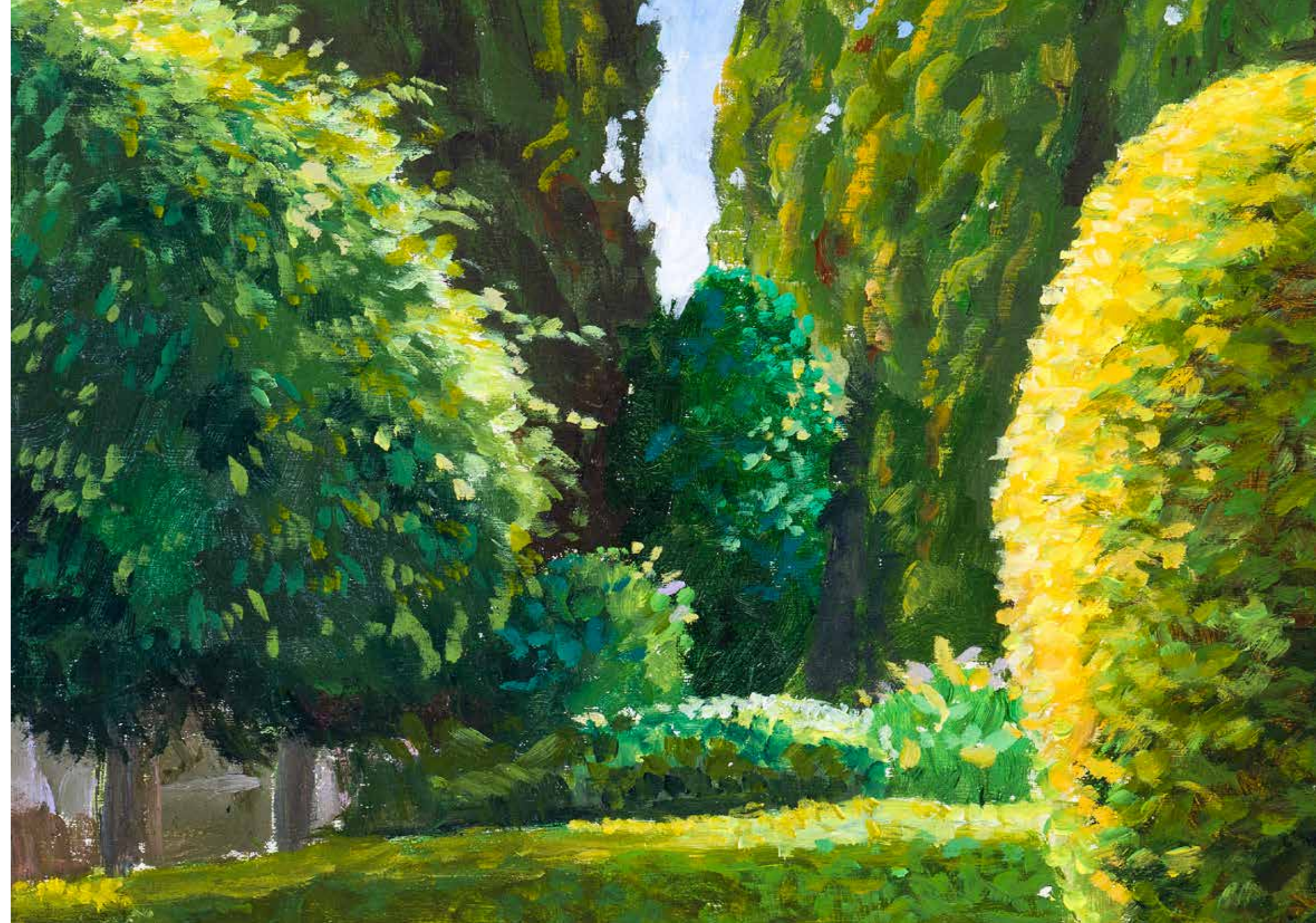
Alexander Pope

Pine and Hedges, Rowan's Garden, 2011
acrylic on canvas, 40 cm x 30 cm





The Lawn, Rowan's Garden, 2011,
acrylic on canvas, 30 cm x 40 cm





Inside Looking Through at the Rowan's 2011,
oil on canvas, 122 cm x 85 cm



The Entrance, Rowan's Garden, 2011
acrylic on board 28 cm x 22.5 cm

Rowan's Garden,
Newcastle, 2012



View Through Pines, Rowan's Garden, 2011,
acrylic on board 28 cm x 22.5 cm





Garden - Lunch Time, Civic, Newcastle, 2011,
acrylic on board 28 cm x 22.5 cm

Agapanthus, Civic Park, Newcastle, 2011,
acrylic on board 28 cm x 22.5 cm

Split Tree and Pines, King Edward Park, 2011,
oil on canvas, 38 cm x 52 cm





Split Tree with Pines, King Edward Park, Newcastle, 2011,
acrylic on board 28 cm x 22.5 cm



Pines, King Edward Park, Newcastle, 2011,
acrylic on board 22.cm x 28 cm

Arkaba Station: Flinders Rangers

Arkaba Station is situated in South Australia's Flinders Rangers approximately twenty kilometres north east of Hawker. The small town of Hawker is about four and a half hours drive directly north from Adelaide and marks where the land become truly marginal in terms of farming.

The station was originally settled in 1851 and occupies 60,000 acres. The garden around the homestead is partly new and partly remnants of a much older garden. To garden in a place such as this and for European plants to survive takes real commitment and to some extent a suspension of the reality of the place. Of all the gardens I have painted, the garden at Arkaba Station is one of the harshest environment of all. The original and traditional owners of this land are the Adnyamathanha people.



View from The Garden, Arkaba Homestead, 2011
oil on board, 20 cm x 90 cm

Private Collection

The Garden, Arkaba Homestead, 2011
oil on board, 20 cm x 30 cm

Private Collection



Coffee in the Flinders's



Elders Range,
Arkaba Station, 2012

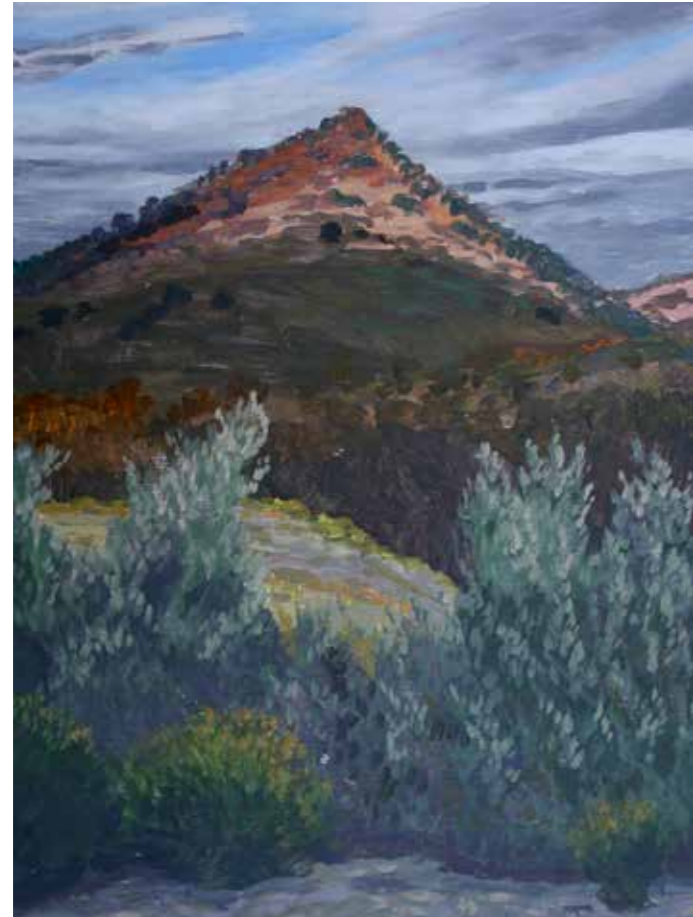




Bushes with Camel Hill, Arkaba Homestead, 2011
oil on board, 30 cm x 20 cm

Looking Through, Rain Arkaba, 2011
oil on board, 20 cm x 30 cm
Private Collection





Bushes Waving at Camel Hill, Arkaba Homestead, 2011
oil on board, 30 cm x 20 cm

Two Bullock Bushes, Flinders, 2010
oil on board, 20 cm x 30 cm

Private Collection





Looking Through, Rain Arkaba Homestead, 2011
oil on board, 20 cm x 30 cm





Three Bushes, Arkaba Homestead, 2011
oil on board, 20 cm x 30 cm
Private Collection

Television Tree, Arkaba Homestead, 2011
oil on board, 20 cm x 30 cm
Private Collection





Booloroo Station Moree, NSW

Booloroo is located at Moree on the North West plains of NSW. The property was first settled in the 1840's and was purchased by (the current owner) Hugh Livingston's great grandfather in 1916. Formally a sheep and cattle property it is now produces wheat and cotton. Hugh's grandparents lived there following their marriage in 1922, built the house and started the garden, and many of the trees and hedges survive today. In 1952 Hugh's parents married and lived at Booloroo, where his mother like his grandmother Mother maintained the garden. Since 2000 Hugh and his wife Gina have lived, worked and maintained the garden. Given that in summer temperatures range from 40 plus degrees and can drop to -3 degrees in winter this garden it is a testament the families love for the place. The garden runs down to the banks of the Gwydir River which provide the water needed to keep a garden such as this looking healthy. The traditional owners of this area are the Kamilaroi people.



Looking Through to Canola, Boolooroo, 2010
acrylic on board, 22.5 cm x 30 cm
Private Collection

“History has no memory of the great majority of gardens that have graced the earth. Gardens are not memorials. They may, as long as they last, be places of memory or sites of recollection, but apart from a few lofty exceptions they do not exist to immortalise their makers or defy the ravages of time.”

Robert Pogue Harrison
Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition



Australian Picturesque, Boolooroo, 2010
acrylic on board, 22.5 cm x 30 cm
Private Collection

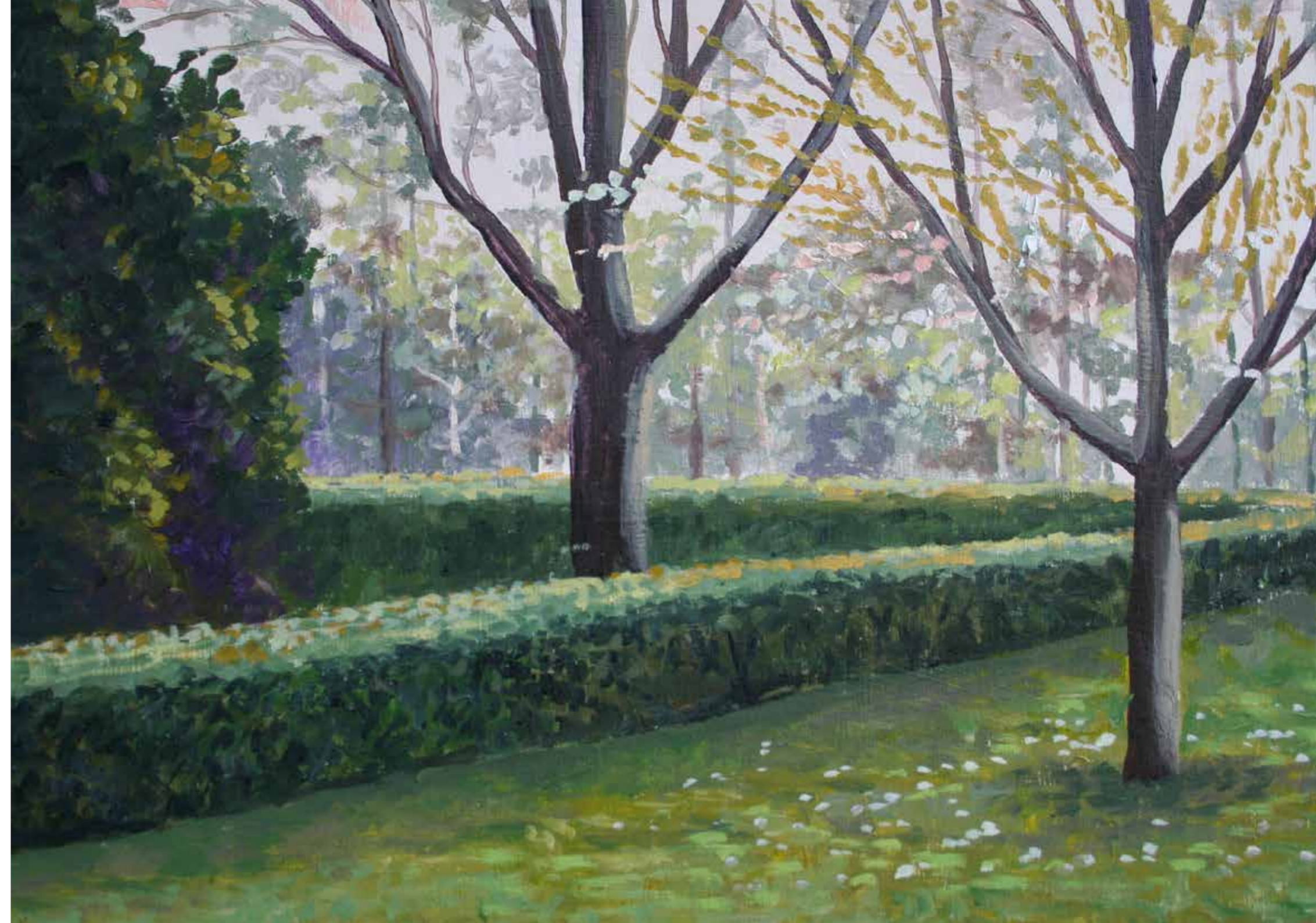


Two views of the garden,
Booloroo Station, Moree





Pine with Yellow, Bulooroo, 2010
acrylic on board, 22.5 cm x 30 cm





Pines with Shadows, Boolooroo, 2010
acrylic on board, 22.5 cm x 30 cm



Hedge with Two trees, Boolooroo, 2010
acrylic on board, 22.5 cm x 30 cm

Private Collection



Burrawang West Station: Parks NSW

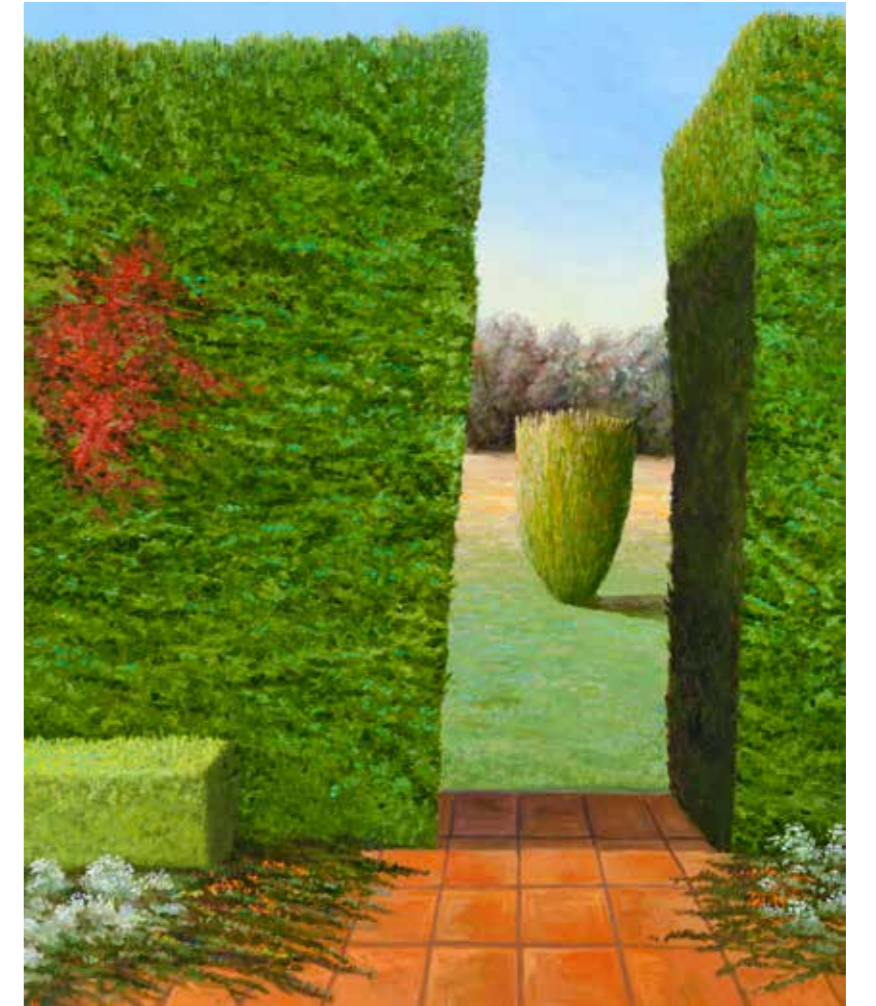
Burrawang West Station is located approximately four hundred kilometres west of Sydney close to the small township of Ootha in Central, New South Wales. The landscape is relatively flat and the quite substantial homestead and garden overlooks the Lacklan River and a protected wetland. It is a working sheep and cattle property which is also currently being run as a luxury outback retreat. The most interesting and attractive features of the garden were the large enclosed spaces, which offered glimpses to cleared spaces and glimpses of the native bush that hugged to river beyond. Outside the enclosures large shaped pines are dotted through the open garden like aliens dropped from space - vainly trying to add some structure to this paired back changed landscape. The traditional owners of the Central West are the Wiradjuri people.



Two Hedged Pines with Split Sky,
Burrawang West Station, 2010,
oil on canvas, 52 cm x 38 cm

Private Collection

Hedge Inbetween Looking Out, 2011
oil on canvas, 80 cm x 65 cm





Shaped Pine, Burrawang West Station, 2011
oil on canvas, 80 cm x 65 cm
Private Collection





Shaped Pine Storm Coming,
Burrawang West Station, 2011,
oil on canvas, 80 cm x 65 cm



Two Hedged Pines, Gold, 2011
oil on canvas, 38 cm x 52 cm
Private Collection



Split View, Burrawang West Station, 2010
oil on canvas, 52 cm x 38 cm
Private Collection

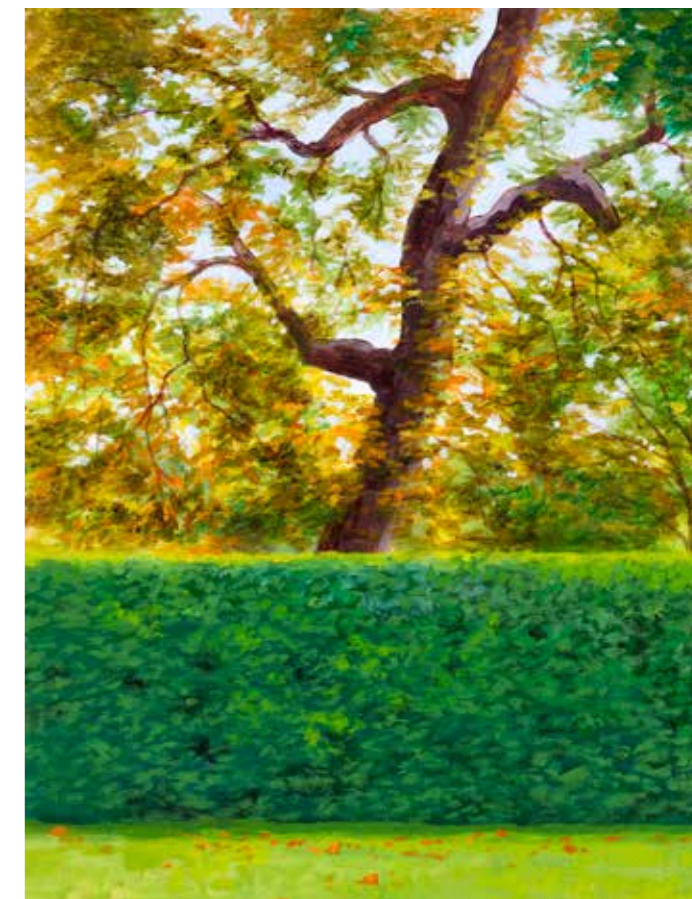
Painting the English Landscape Garden

The works in this section were the results from a field trip to England in 2011 as part of the research for my doctorate - all were painted en plein air although two were finished in the studio in oil on my return. In the two weeks I was in England I did twenty two paintings of eight different gardens, and for me these paintings are not only individual images of the different gardens I experienced but collectively they constitute two very intense weeks of my life where I was able to paint from sun-up to sun-down and largely please myself. Four gardens worth highlighting are the Long Garden and the Parterre revival gardens at Cliveden House; the largely cottage garden at Uplands House where I stayed in the Cotswolds and the faithfully restored Capability Brown landscape garden at Compton Verny. But of all these gardens the obsessive nature of the Long Garden at Cliveden House, its shaped spiraled pines, the topiary bird forms and the formal boxed areas framing the colour stands out for its almost comical personality and the difficulty it posed as a subject for painting.



Oaks, Kensington Garden, 2011,
acrylic on canvas, 40 cm x 30 cm

Oak and Hedge Kensington Garden, 2011,
acrylic on canvas, 40 cm x 30 cm





The Pine, Hyde Park, 2011,
acrylic on canvas, 30 cm x 40 cm



Oak tree,
Hyde Park, 2011



“The typical English landscape as generally visualised would consist of undulating grass that leads somewhere down to an irregularly shaped piece of water over which a bridge arches, of trees grouped casually, with cattle or deer about the slopes, and of houses and other buildings glimpsed in the middle or far distance.”

John Dixon Hunt



Cliveden House, The Parterre Garden, 2011
acrylic on canvas, 40 cm x 30 cm



The Darlecs, Long Garden, Cliveden House, 2011,
acrylic on canvas, 40 cm x 30 cm

Cliveden House / Bird in the Garden, 2011
acrylic on canvas, 40 cm x 30 cm
Private Collection





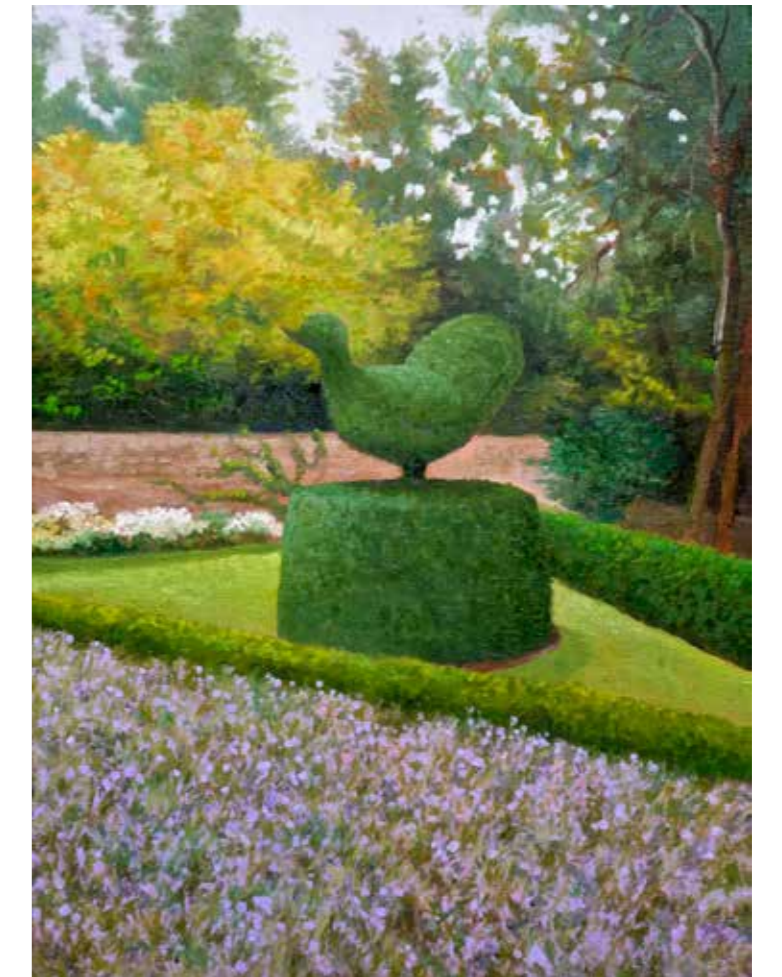
Tree taking a drink from the pond,
Cliveden House, 2011

“Gardens are humanly created things.’ It can be said that both also challenge our perception of time. Gardens, unlike paintings, “have a natural life of their own which exist independently of their formal determinations.”

Robert Pogue Harrison
Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition

(Extract from *The Artist's Garden: Humanising the Landscape*)

Lavender Bird, Long Garden, Cliveden House, 2011-12
oil on canvas, 52 cm x 38 cm





Upton House, The Flower Garden, 2011,
acrylic on canvas, 40 cm x 30 cm



Uplands House, The Flower Urn, 2011
acrylic on canvas, 40 cm x 30 cm

Two different views of the
Parterre Garden, Cliveden House, 2011





Red Hot Poker, Uplands House, 2011,
acrylic on canvas, 40 cm x 30 cm

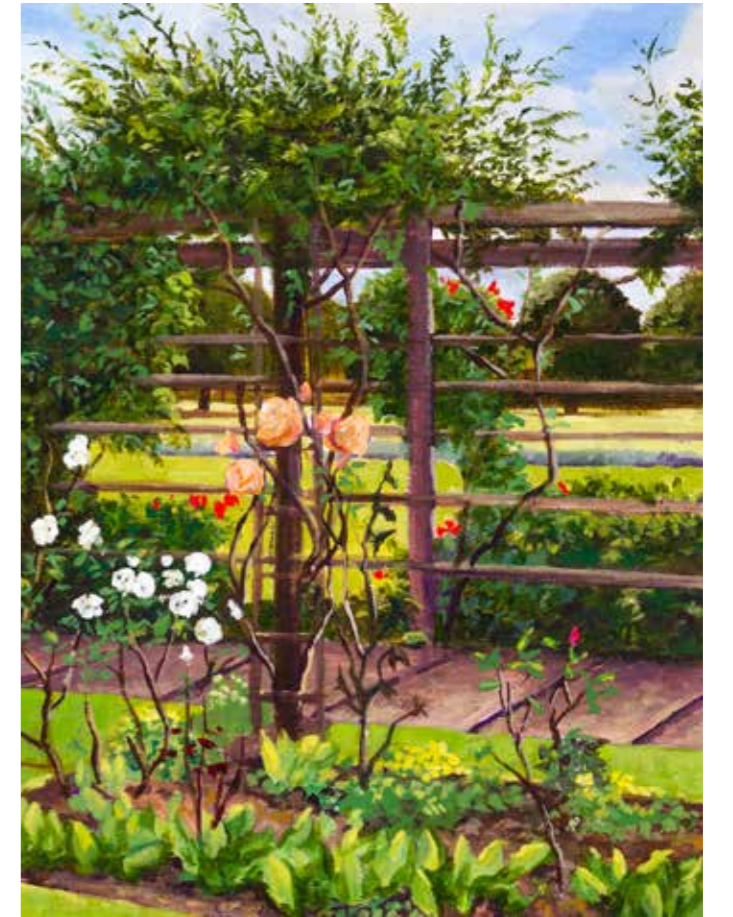
Artist Stanley Spencer acknowledged that “everything for me has especially in the visible world a degree of meaning.” He also described his love of gardens as a private kind of “heaven.”

Stephen Parissen
Stanley Spencer and the English Garden

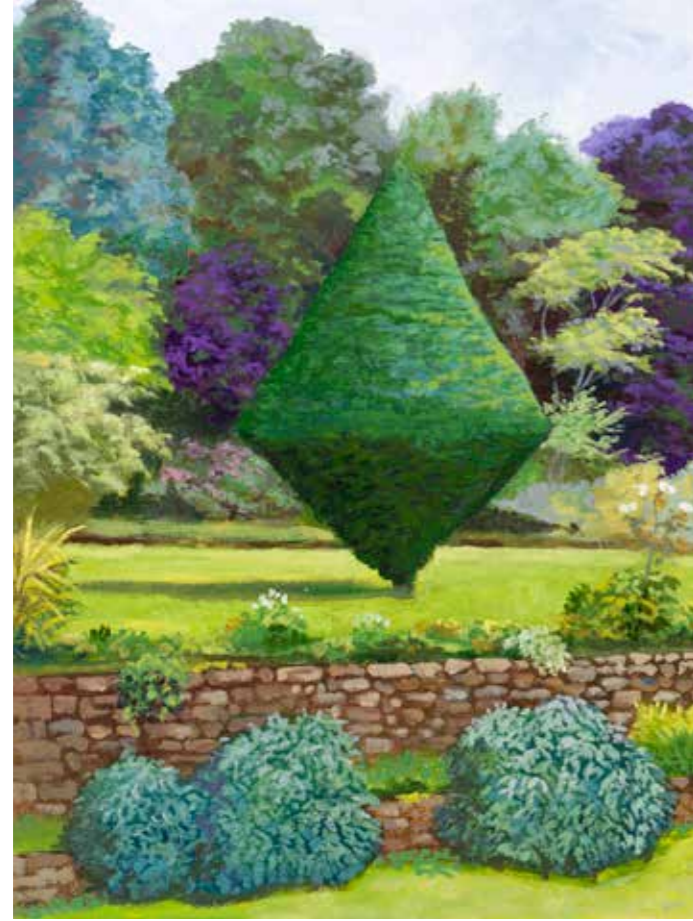




Two Urns, Uplands House - Poppies Garden, 2011,
acrylic on canvas, 40 cm x 30 cm



Uplands House, Poppies Rose Garden, 2011
acrylic on canvas, 40 cm x 30 cm



Shaped Pine, Cotswolds, 2011,
acrylic on canvas, 40 cm x 30 cm
Private Collection



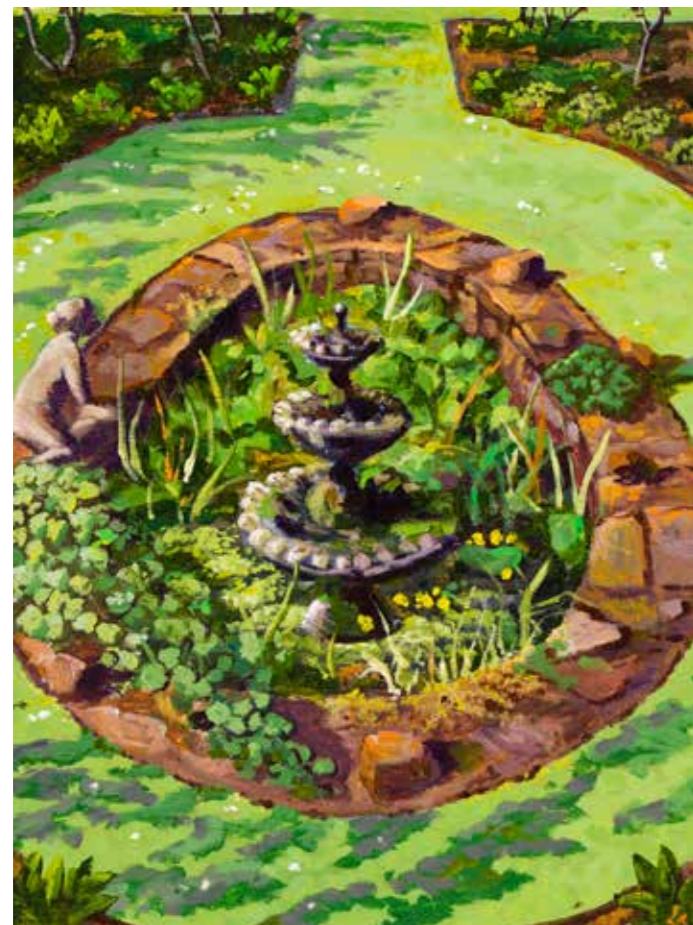
“conventional wisdom has it that gardens first arose either as a byproduct of agriculture or as a form of primitive agriculture”

Robert Pogue Harrison
Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition



Uplands House Garden Panorama, 2011 - 2012
acrylic and oil on canvas, 38 cm x 208 cm

Private Collection



The Fountain, Poppies Garden - Uplands House, 2011
acrylic on canvas, 40 cm x 30 cm



The Ivy Tree, Cotswolds, 2011
acrylic on canvas, 40 cm x 30 cm



Through Big Pines, Compton Verney - Cotswolds, 2011
acrylic on canvas, 40 cm x 30 cm

Private Collection

Capability Brown's rise to prominence ushered in the era of the 'Parkland garden' and what was considered a more natural form of gardening took hold in the 1750's. "Hills were made to undulate gently, irregular clumps of trees were planted, streams were turned into serpentine lakes, clearances were made and branches lopped to afford vistas."

Roy Strong
The Artist and the Garden



View of the Capability Brown designed grounds,
Compton Verney, England, 2011



Framed by Pines, Compton Verry, 2011
acrylic on canvas, 40 cm x 30 cm





Study for Garden of Remembrance, 2011,
oil on canvas, 52cm x 38cm

Private Collection



St. Katherine's Church Yard,
Knockhold, Kent, 2011



“appearances owe their poignancy – their almost unbearable beauty and power of evocation – to the time-boundedness that attunes us to the fleeting views of nature.”

Robert Pogue Harrison
Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition

Garden of Remembrance, 2011,
oil on canvas, 170 cm x 120 cm

Stuart's Creek Station: Roma, Queensland

The Stuart's Creek house and garden were first established in 1914. Ken and Lillian Tomkins moved there in 1954 – back then, the house was smaller and the garden originally just included bottle trees oleanders, a beautiful Dorothy Perkins rose on a trellis which is still there, two round beds of polyanthus (rose) one to the west and one to the south, a date palm and fig trees.

The garden was originally watered with bore water (which is harsh) so Lillian Tomkins put in dams for fresh water. A tennis court was put in in 1954 and garden extended as part of this. The athel pine trees which are now outside the garden were put in then. The bottle tree in my paintings was originally part of the garden but now stands beyond the fence and boundary hedge. It is important to note that it is a cruel climate with heavy frosts in winter and hot dry summers so the garden is limited with what will grow. The pool was built in 1978, tennis court demolished and the size of the garden reduced at the same time. The harshness of the region contributes to the struggle involved to realise this oasis and which is at the heart of this gardens constant state of flux. That defines its persona ... and that's what makes this garden such a stark and interesting subject.



Study for View from the Garden,
Stuart's Creek Station, (Rain Coming) 2011,
acrylic on canvas, 52cm x 38cm

Private Collection

“Gardening imparts an
organic perspective on
the passage of time”

William Cowper

View from the Garden, Stuart's Creek Station, (Rain
Coming) 2014, oil on canvas, 180 cm x 138 cm

Private Collection





Front garden views of Stuart's Creek Station,
Roma, Queensland





Three Views from the Garden Stuart's Creek Station, Roma, 2014
triptych - oil on canvas, 52 x 116 cm

Private Collection



“Rural scenes, of almost every kind, are delightful to the mind of a man. The verdant plain, the flowery mead, the meandering stream, the playful lamb, the warbling of birds, are all capable of exciting the gently agreeable emotions.”

Vicesimus Knox

On the Pleasures of a Garden (1779)



View from the Garden, Stuart's Creek Station, Roma, 2011
acrylic and oil on canvas, diptych - 38 cm x 20w8 cm

Private Collection



The Everglades: Leura, Blue Mountains

The Everglades sits on a ridge looking across the Jamison Valley to Mount Cloudmaker, Kanangra Falls and Mount Solitary. On the western side, the land drops away dramatically to Gordon Falls below. After acquiring the thirteen-acre site, in 1936 Van de Velde commissioned the already successful Danish horticulturalist and landscape designer, Paul Sorensen, to create what was until then his most ambitious project.

Sorensen, born in Copenhagen in 1890, trained at the Danish Hørsholm Planteskole. While studying, his experience included the maintenance of Queen Alexandra of Denmark's summer-house, Villa Hvidovre. It is not clear why Sorensen moved to Australia in 1915 but there was war in Europe, Australia was in drought and there was little work when he arrived. Sorensen and Van de Velde formed a great working partnership. The industrialist's tremendous energy resources and deep love of modernism combined with Sorensen's sensitivity, training and unique skills. Together they produced what is regarded as one of Australia's great gardens.



Looking at Pines, Ground Level, The Everglades, 2012
oil on canvas, 52 cm x 38 cm

Private Collection



Looking at Pines, The Everglades, 2012
oil on canvas, 52 x 38cm

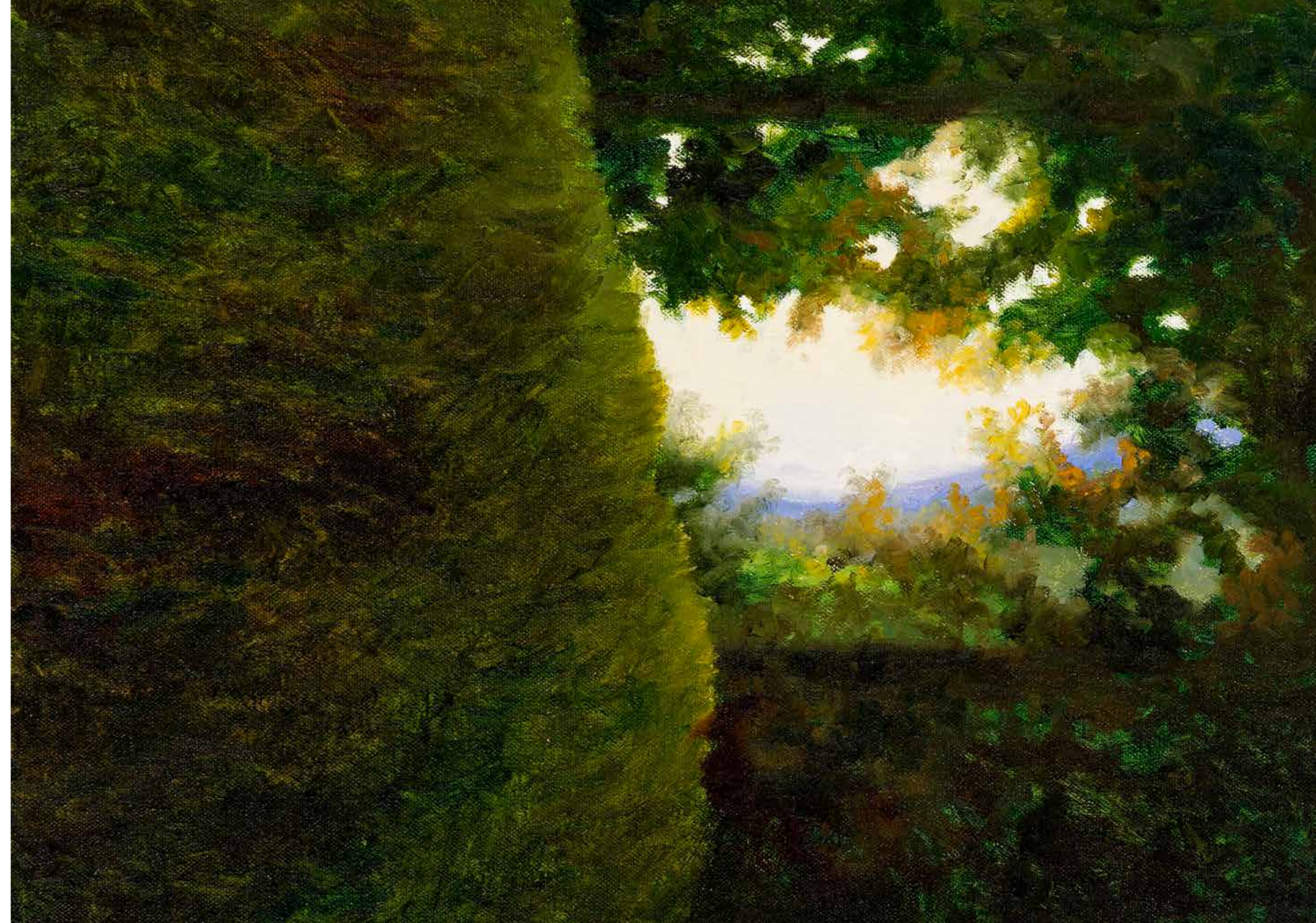


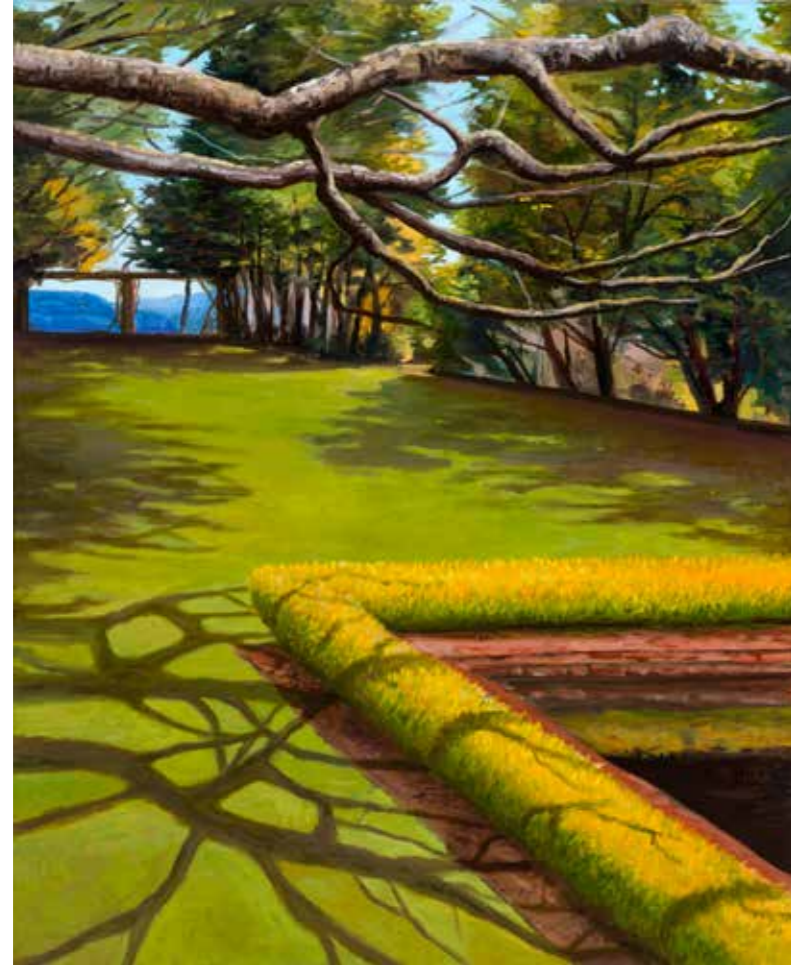
“where appearances recede into the depths of space and time even as they come forward to stake their claim in the phenomenal realm, they make special demands on our powers of observation.”

Robert Pogue Harrison
Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition

Looking into Light, The Everglades, 2012
oil on canvas, 52 cm x 38 cm

Private Collection





• To view an augmented reality version of this film, download the Aurasma App and click 'follow' on a mobile device (smart-phone or tablet) using the link: <http://auras.ma/s/abg80> (You can then hold your mobile device over this image to view me painting the painting inside the painting).

Golden Pond, The Everglades, 2013,
oil on canvas, 80 cm x 65 cm

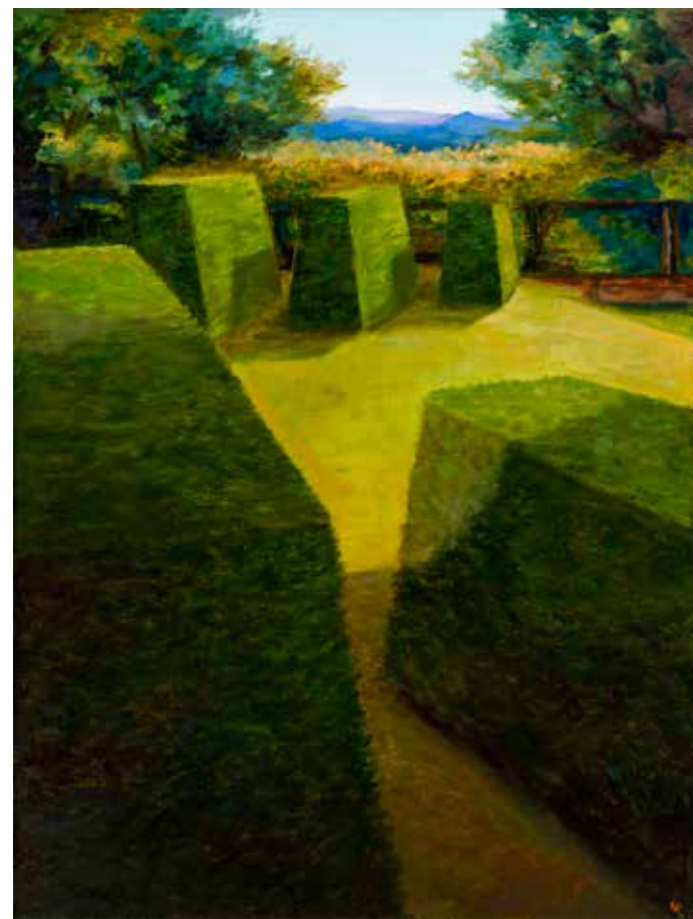
“Sorenson excelled at pruning trees and with theatrical gestures, extolled the virtues of bringing out the ‘spirit’ of a tree.”

Coleen Morris

Inside Hedges, Looking out, The Everglades, 2013,
oil on canvas, 80 cm x 65 cm







Five Pines, The Everglades, 2012,
oil on canvas, 52 cm x 38 cm

Private Collection



Monument, The Everglades, 2013,
oil on canvas, 110cm x 75cm

Queensland University of Technology Collection



Istanbul, Gallipoli and the Memorial Garden

In 2013 I undertook a painting trip to Turkey to paint the Islamic Gardens in Istanbul and the memorial garden in Gallipoli. The Islamic garden is based around the idea of paradise and are inwardly focused and generally take the form of a courtyard which is divided into four parts with water at the centre. These gardens proved to difficult to either gain access to or problematic to paint. Instead I focused on the more western form of gardens around the foreshore of the city.

In painting terms the numerous memorial gardens of Gallipoli proved a much more fruitful proposition. When I arrived at Gallipoli, three things struck me. The first was a sense of tranquility. The second was that the area where the battles took place is of a relatively modest scale. And third was the deep green, almost verdent hills. This place profoundly affected me and it forced me to seek new ways to deal with my garden subject.



Hanging Trees, Istanbul, 2013,
acrylic on paper; 30 cm x 20cm



Foreshore Garden,
Istanbul, 2011



Trees Leaning, Istanbul, 2013,
acrylic on paper, 30 cm x 20cm

“Allah has promised to the believing men and the believing women, gardens, beneath which rivers flow, to abide in them, and goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual abode; and best of all is Allah’s goodly pleasure; that is the grand achievement”

Qur’an 9.72

Waving Bush with Two Trees, Istanbul, 2013,
acrylic on paper, 30 cm x 20cm





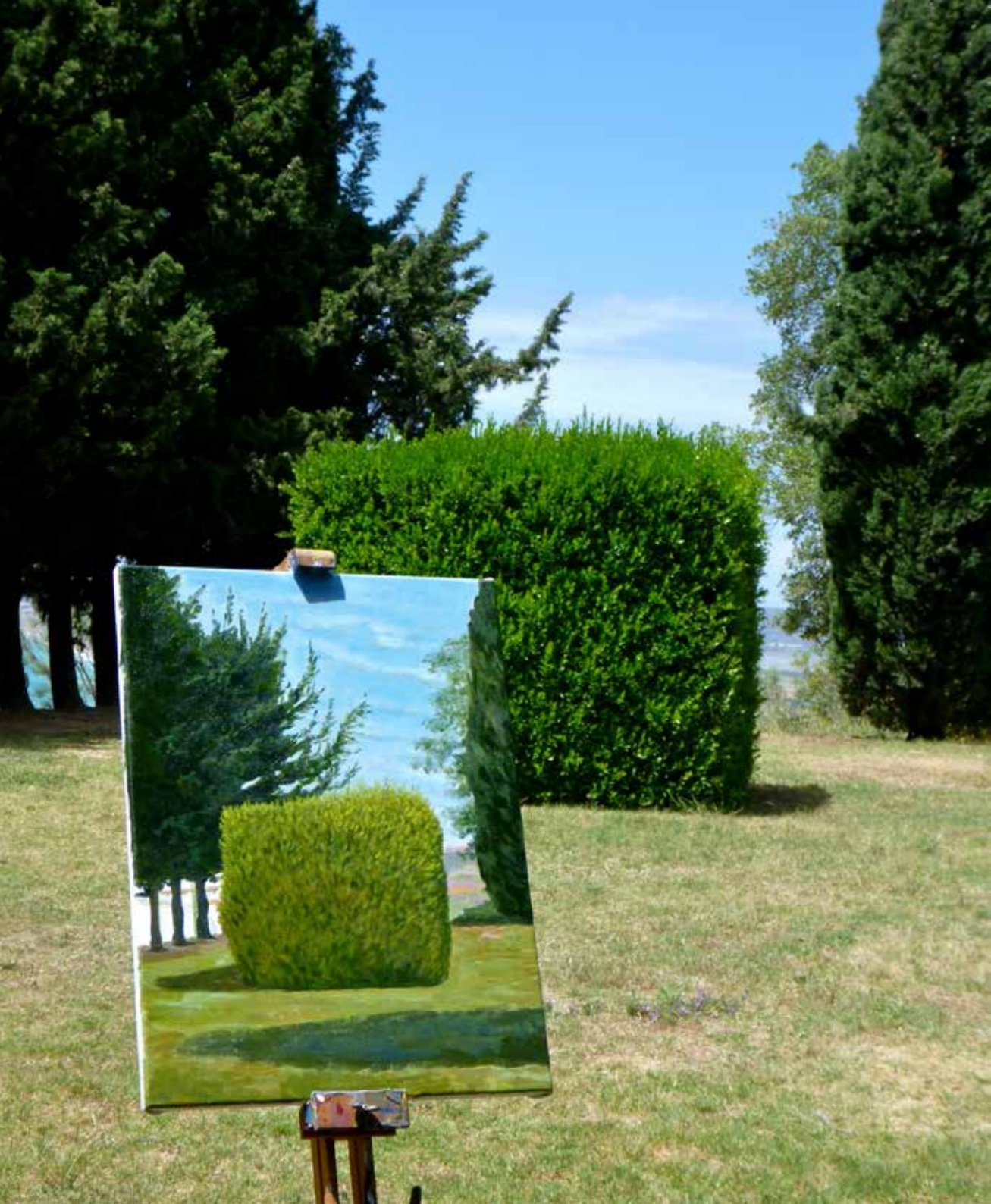
“The sum of our pasts,
generation laid over
generation, like the slow
mould of the seasons, forms
the compost of our future.
We live off it.”

Simon Schama
Landscape and Memory



Split Pink Pines, Gallipoli, 2014,
oil on metal, 11 cm x 10 cm x 1.8cm

Private collection



Painting at The Nek, Gallipoli 2013

While I was painting at The Nek (now the site of a garden and memorial to the Turkish soldiers who lost their lives), I mentioned to our Turkish guide, who was sitting quietly watching me paint, that I had expected Gallipoli to have much less vegetation and to be a harsher, rockier landscape. To which she replied that the “landscape had been changed forever by the blood and bones of the dead.” I stayed painting, not talking but profoundly moved by what she had said. Some minutes later she added: “Oh, and the nitrogen from the shells and mustard gas also made a big contribution.”

The painting on the opposing page is the one I had been working on during this conversation. I was so moved by what she had said that I stopped painting ... the work still remains unfinished.



Memorial Hedge, The Nek, Gallipoli 2014,
oil on metal, 9.3 cm x 14 cm x 1.3 cm

Private collection



Big Tree View, Anzac Cove, 2014
oil on metal, 16 cm x 11 cm x 1.8 cm

Private Collection





Pink Hill of Remembrance, Gallipoli, 2014
oil on metal, 12 cm x 17cm x 1.2 cm

Private Collection

I found the trip to Gallipoli quite disconcerting. The idea of going to such a place and trying to 'capture' something seemed, once I was there, quite pathetic, even disrespectful. I went with what I think were honourable intentions but soon realised that if I was to produce anything of meaning I would have to deal with this landscape differently. After the first day's painting I spent most of the time I had left drawing, in an attempt to get an overall sense of the place. In the evenings, back in my hotel room, I painted some miniatures of the gardens of Anzac Cove, Lone Pine and The Nek, not necessarily as finished works but more as meditative pieces and as a different way into the subject. Painting the miniatures led me to paint the tins.

Blue Green Tree, Gallipoli, 2015,
oil on metal, 14 cm x 20 cm x 2 cm

Private collection





Blue Moon Sphinx Gallipoli 2015,
oil on metal, 13x17x2cm
Private Collection

While not purposeful in its creation, the events and what took place created a wholly different place, which is now set aside, tended and relived. With gardens there usually is some purposeful human agency behind the creation of a garden, but this one has been created almost accidentally and is all the more moving for that. The paintings inside the tins came about because I was searching for some way to connect not just with the narrative of killing and death but with the individual stories that collectively make up that narrative.



Monument Through Pines, The Nek, Gallipoli, 2015,
oil on metal, 9 cm x 10 cm x 2 cm



Headstone / Anzac Cove View, 2014
oil on metal, 11 cm x 16 cm x 1.8c m

Soft Violet View, The Nek, 2014
oil on metal, 9,3 cm x 14 cm x 1.6 cm





Pine, Brighton Beach, Gallipoli Landscape, 2014
watercolour on board, 9 cm x 6 cm

Three Clouds, Gallipoli Landscape, 2014,
watercolour on board, 9 cm x 6 cm





Looking into Pine, Gallipoli Landscape, 2014,
watercolour on board, 6 cm x 9 cm



Four Pines, Gallipoli Landscape, 2014,
watercolour on board, 6 cm x 9 cm

Reframing the Garden Landscape: New Directions

These more recent works mark a shift from my depiction of what could be describe as my 'pure' garden landscapes into a more figurative narrative. These new paintings still have the garden as the central motif but now the garden acts more as a backdrop. This compositional structure has enabled more direct visual storytelling and the potential to shroud each work with more personal and semi-political meaning.



Bathroom Window View with Pink and Blue, 2015
oil on canvas, 84 cm x 122cm

“Most gardeners dig no deeper for hidden meaning in their work than to get at some entangled bindweed or intruding thistle. Yet in the physical gestures of gardening with space, fork, trowel, and pruning shears we are linked in our urban disguises with the not-too-distant pastoral world of our common origins, participating in one of man’s primal activities.”

William Howard Adams
Nature Perfected: Garden Through History

Family Portrait with Mandarin 2015
oil on canvas, 241 cm x 141 cm





Succulents, Waiting for Winter, 2015
oil on canvas, 91 cm x 122 cm

Studio, Springwood, 2013



There are many people over the past five years who have helped me in different ways to see this 'Artist Garden' project through. To all those people who have offered helpful and sage advice, whose gardens I have painted and who have exhibited and bought my paintings ... I thank you., To the best of my recollection and in no particular order, they are: Ruth Waller; Gordon Bull, Stephanie Hammond, John Warburton, w Suzie Galway, Jock Xxxxx, Paul and Belinda Walter; Randi Linnigar; Robert Linnigar; Amanda Penrose Hart, Professor Tony Capon, Wendy Relf, Associate Professor Jane Dixon, Associate Professor Allen, Tracy Allen, Simon and Luba Bosch, Mick Fell, Lou Kerr; Mark Greenhill, Peter and Maria Hadjimichael, Kate Robinson, Tom Blackett, Lesley Snelgrove, Monica and John Rouke, Jane Eager, Rick Millar; Scott Pollack, Michael and Sally Herron, Lillian Tomkins and Libby, Lady Poppie Cooksey, Euan Macleod, Susan Jarvis, Chris and Martina O'Doherty, Gillian and Kent Shaw, Paul Wright, Wendy Tsai, Elisabeth Bodey, Cath and Duncan Sim, Diedre Brennan, David Spencer; Suzie Cowden, Kerrie Coles, The Rowan's of Newcastle and the team at Carbon8

To my family Adrienne, Mathilda and Lucien a world of thanks for your enduring support.



