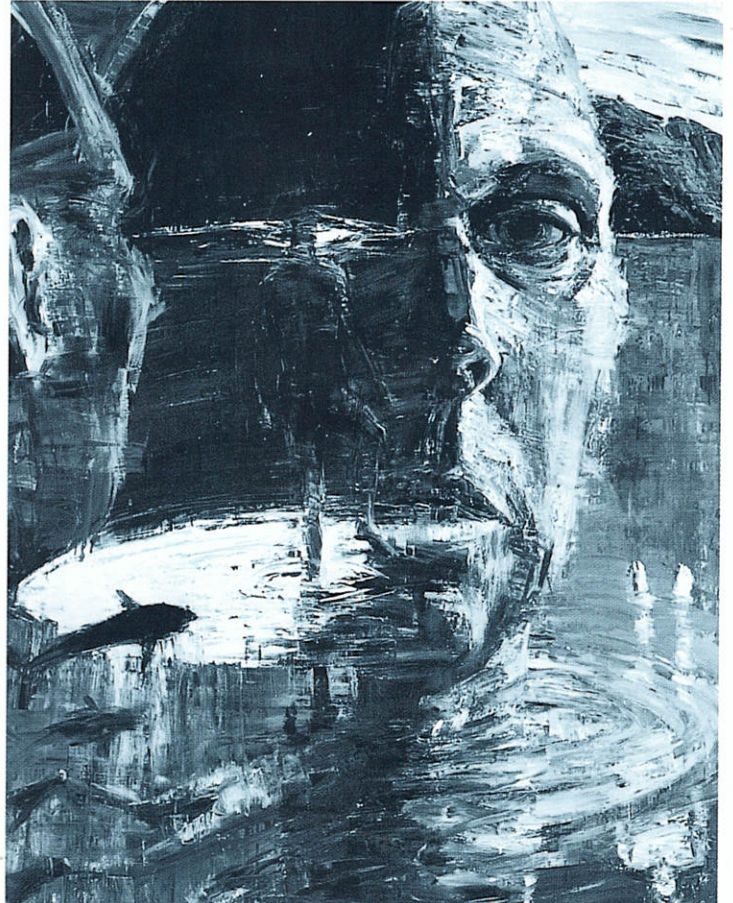


Until 29 October 2000, Cairns Regional Gallery presents a major solo exhibition by 1999 Archibald Prize winning artist Euan Macleod.

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EUAN MACLEOD

PAINTINGS 1984 - 2000



Euan Macleod: Paintings 1984-2000 features the 1999 Archibald Prize winning painting *Head like a hole*, along with paintings produced from early in the artist's career to the present day.

Euan Macleod was born in Christchurch, New Zealand in 1956, and studied art at the Christchurch Technical Institute and Canterbury Institute. He considers himself to be a product of the New Zealand landscape tradition, but the human figure also features strongly in his work.

The artist's expressionistic style places figures or groups of people squarely in magnificent Australian and New Zealand landscapes. The figures are not dwarfed or overwhelmed, but they are shown as vulnerable and essentially alone in potentially threatening environments.

Euan Macleod held his first Australian exhibition at Watters Gallery in Sydney in 1982, depicting two figures in interiors. Since then, he has exhibited portraits, still lifes and nudes, many of which are displayed in the Cairns Regional Gallery exhibition.

From 1991, he began painting haunting images of a single nude male figure in the Australian landscape, establishing the theme of the human being in relation to the environment and portraying the mutability of the human condition.

His more recent works show the figure becoming fainter or 'dying' in relation to the landscape. The artist has also begun to divide or split the canvas so that he is able to alter scales and perspectives within a work.

Above and front cover detail:
Boat/ Lane Cove
1989
oil on canvas
Private Collection

Above right:
Self portrait / Head like a hole
1998/99
oil on canvas
UTS Art Collection

The Archibald Prize for portrait painting is probably the best known Australian art prize, generating huge interest and debate each year. So what's it like to win? Euan Macleod shares his feelings and observations...

Euan Macleod didn't think he had a hope of winning the Archibald Prize when he entered in 1999. First, he's a New Zealander, second, the painting he entered was a self-portrait and third, it was the first time he had entered.

Despite these perceived disadvantages, his painting *Head like a hole* was hung in the Archibald exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, to the artist's surprise and delight.

'To be hung in the Archibald is seen by many as being the equivalent of winning the Wynne or the Sulman Prizes [the counterparts of the Archibald Prize in landscape and genre painting respectively]. I was pleased to be hung but I didn't expect to win,' says Euan Macleod.

When Euan found out he had won, he was obviously pleased, but also felt a strange sense of responsibility.

'It was such a relief when I went along to the prize presentation this year and saw someone else winning it – it released a huge weight off my shoulders. People see it as the most important thing in your life, as if you've never done anything before.'

Winning the Archibald Prize, says Euan Macleod, is seen by many as 'a seal of seriousness' for an artist, which is very useful in many ways.

'It makes your work much more visible to audiences that would go to a state gallery or regional gallery, but wouldn't consider going to an art dealer gallery. And that's sad in a lot of ways because you could have had thirty one-person shows, but one single work shown in the Archibald receives all the attention.

'The really positive thing about the Archibald is that it gets people thinking and talking about visual art – about what is a portrait and what makes a good painting.

'I think part of its popularity is that people like to look at other people. Often the person who's in the

painting gets as much interest as the artist. I heard someone say after the 2000 winner was announced that David Wenham, the actor from the TV show *Sea Change*, had won the Archibald.' (It was a portrait of Wenham by Adam Cullen that won.)

Vehement criticism of the winning painting seems to be as traditional as the Archibald Prize itself and the competition can also generate a fair amount of bitterness among the entrants.

'Some people have been entering for years and they think it's their turn to win. They get very resentful when they don't, and they're often the ones who criticise the paintings that do win. I think you've got to enter in the spirit of the competition and accept that it's very difficult to compare one painting with another and there's certainly a lottery element to the whole thing. Many artists did have the right attitude and they were really supportive of my win.

'I actually felt quite hurt when people were debating whether or not the painting should have won, because it's a self portrait and quite a personal painting. I actually overheard a TV reporter saying "come on, we've got to find someone who doesn't like it" and of course, they did, and it felt rotten to hear someone calling your painting trash on National TV.

'Probably the most bizarre thing was the criticism I received for looking too happy, smiling in a colourful shirt. They thought that because the work was dark and introspective, that I was some kind of a fraud for looking cheerful. Of course, people like me express their innermost feelings through art and music, which probably allows them to be happy on the outside.

'Some people really want you to be a certain way, especially if you're a "real" artist who's won the Archibald, and they're clearly disappointed when you're not.'



Euan Macleod in his Sydney studio

Below:
Pink frost
1998/99
oil on canvas

