



# Ross Laurie



This was Ross Laurie's third trip to Fowlers Gap – as such, he felt a growing familiarity revealed aspects of the land he'd not previously noticed. Laurie lives in rural New South Wales and spends much of his time painting the area around his home. His gestural paintings are often motifs of the land and trees from around this area. A consummate painter of the landscape, he worked with gusto while on the tour to Fowlers Gap. This energy is evident in the colourful works he created both *in situ* and in the months following his return from the desert.

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**H**ow important is the landscape to your work? Nearly all painting refers to the world somehow and in my least representational work I am still thinking of the land, the country. Visitors to my studio over the years have had occasion to comment on how much the pictures look like the landscape. Sometimes this has surprised me, probably because I didn't always have a particular place in mind. Sometimes I see things and try to find a parallel; at other times I paint things that help me see the country. But certainly the country around Walcha seems to suit my formal interests, or you could say I paint the way I do because of the way the country is.

## Specifically, what is it about the landscape of Fowlers Gap you've investigated that continues to influence your work?

The scale at Fowlers Gap is very different; the country at Walcha seems much more intimate. So I have found the sensations of being out in the landscape, and the nature of one's self-awareness, to be a novel experience.

The country has a rawness that could also be interpreted as a kind of truth. As this was my third trip out there, I felt that I was starting to understand this more. I also felt that the land revealed its bones despite, in this case, the vegetation, and that was something I was trying to get at.

## Dealing with abstract forms, what are you trying to capture and how do you do it?

The painting has to operate on several levels. It has to work formally, so composition etc. It has to have relevance or a truth, which sometimes can't be recognised until it is found... so there has to be a searching of some description. There has to be, as much as possible, a losing of the overtly conscious state, so that there is space for things to happen without self-awareness. But, in the end, it just has to all come together, and you really can feel it when it is happening.

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Several months later I drove with my wife and children across the continent and back, so much had Fowlers Gap whet my appetite.



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## Colour and line are very important elements of your compositions. Did the landscape on this tour impact your approach to colour and line differently in any way?

I tried to paint with local colour initially, but the pictures lacked the bounce or range or contrast or juxtapositions they needed to truly reflect the heightened sensations of being out there.

Certainly I enjoyed the linear possibilities and range of mark making that was suggested with even a cursory glance.

## Do you enjoy painting *en plein air*? Is this a regular part of your painting process?

I really enjoyed painting *en plein air*, and I found I also needed to walk in the country. At Walcha I can get trapped by the information working outside, although I certainly do so when I feel I need to. Again, walking is for me a big and necessary part of painting.



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## The life of an artist is often one of solitude. How did you find the experience of working amongst a group of artists?

Occasionally the idle chatter allowed for a little less self-awareness in one's work, which surprised me. With everyone working it was hard to prevaricate too much, and I think I had a productive time. I also really enjoyed seeing other people's work.

## What challenges did this trip throw at you and your painting?

Plenty of challenges, and I was anxious to see what, if anything, I might make. It was the high point in a year of doubt, and attempts to paint *plein air* on return proved difficult but instructive. As a painting experience it certainly rocked the boat, which can only be a good thing.

## And what was the most enjoyable part of the tour?

I certainly enjoyed the company of all the other travellers, and took comfort from knowing my personality defects were universal. I think my exposure to the vast sea of Sydney art world talk should sustain me for many years!

The country was astounding, and several months later I drove with my wife and children across the continent and back, so much had Fowlers Gap whet my appetite.

Of course the beautiful food was vital as an antidote to Euan Macleod's New Zealand ovine self-deprecation. ■

Ross Laurie is represented by Damien Minton Gallery, Sydney, and Scott Livesey Galleries, Melbourne.

[www.damienmintongallery.com.au](http://www.damienmintongallery.com.au)  
[www.scottliveseygalleries.com](http://www.scottliveseygalleries.com)

EXHIBITION  
Ross Laurie  
Damien Minton Gallery, Sydney  
September, 2012

01 Across The Ridges – Fowlers gap, 2011, oil on board, 119 x 60cm  
02 Fowlers Gap II, 2011, oil on board, 59.5 x 59.5cm  
03 From the Tanks III, 2011, oilstick on paper, 50 x 50cm  
04 Ridge & Creek – Fowlers Gap, 2011, oil on canvas, 184.5 x 153.5cm

Images courtesy the artist, Damien Minton Gallery, Sydney, and Scott Livesey Galleries, Melbourne

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