



SALIENT

CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS
AT THE WESTERN FRONT



1918
—
2018

100 years on

SALIENT

CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS AT THE WESTERN FRONT

New England Regional Art Museum (NERAM), Armidale

23 March – 3 June 2018

www.neram.com.au

Bathurst Regional Art Gallery

10 August – 7 October 2018

www.bathurstart.com.au

Anzac Memorial, Sydney

October 2018 – 17 February 2019

www.anzacmemorial.nsw.gov.au

Bank Art Museum Moree

5 March – 29 April 2019

www.bamm.org.au

Muswellbrook Regional Arts Centre

11 May – 30 June 2019

www.muswellbrookartscentre.com.au

Tweed Regional Gallery

21 November 2019 – 16 February 2020

artgallery.tweed.nsw.gov.au

Opposite page: (Front row, left to right) Wendy Sharpe, Harrie Fasher, Euan Macleod, Steve Lopes, Amanda Penrose Hart
(Middle row, left to right) Ian Marr, Deirdre Bean, Ross Laurie, Michelle Hiscock, Luke Sciberras
(Back row, left to right) Paul Ferman, Idris Murphy



George Coates, *Australian official war artist's 1916-18, 1920*, oil on canvas
Australian War Memorial collection



DEIRDRE BEAN
HARRIE FASHER
PAUL FERMAN
MICHELLE HISCOCK
ROSS LAURIE
STEVE LOPES
EUAN MACLEOD
IAN MARR
IDRIS MURPHY
AMANDA PENROSE HART
LUKE SCIBERRAS
WENDY SHARPE



Crosses sitting on a pillbox, Polygon Wood



Pillbox, Polygon Wood



The Hon. Don Harwin

Minister for the Arts, NSW Parliament

From a population of fewer than 5 million, almost 417,000 Australian men enlisted to fight in the Great War, with 60,000 killed and 156,000 wounded, gassed or taken prisoner.

My grandfather was one of the young men to enlist, joining up just after his 18th birthday. He spent 1917 and 1918 on the Western Front, assigned to a light trench mortar battery. Generally working in threes, the soldiers in these batteries were deployed to the front line so that the enemy was within range. Mortars fired high-explosive fragmentation bombs (generally 15 to 20 at a time) at a steep trajectory and could lob them directly into an opponent's trench or dugout, and then they would detonate. Hundreds of jagged steel splinters would be created by each bursting bomb. It was a brutally effective tactic. But it was dangerous work and, needless to say, these soldiers were priority targets for opposing forces.

In July 2015, I retraced my grandfather's steps through Picardy to battlefields where he fought, including in the final Allied offensive that eventually brought about an end to the war.

Standing on top of the hill outside the village of Mont St Quentin, which Australian troops took in a decisive battle, it is impossible not to be captivated by the beauty of the landscape, but also haunted by the suffering of those who experienced this bloody turning point in the war. It was a profoundly moving experience.

Art is well placed to express the diverse emotions that are evoked by the juxtaposition of the violence of the conflict and its interaction with the landscape. This book, recording works now being exhibited by 12 artists, is based on a journey they took to the Western Front and their response through their art.



Adrian helmet, French water bottle and Australian helmet found at the Somme



Ross Laurie, Bill Nuttal and Wendy Sharpe, Second Australian Division Memorial, Mont St Quentin



Original Mont St Quentin Second Australian Division Memorial sculpture by Web Gilbert destroyed by the German's in WWII, 1940



Looking through Voigtlander camera, Mont St Quentin battlefield



View towards Corbie



Wendy Sharpe, Hamel



Artists looking over Corbie



Wendy Sharpe drawing sculptures by Käthe Kollwitz



Top: Artists walking along tracks on Hill 60, Ypres
Bottom: Ross Laurie sketching a pillbox on Hill 60, Ypres

In their footsteps



Robert Heather

Director, NERAM

Warfare is a subject that has always attracted artists, despite the often repellent subject matter. Indeed, the great history paintings commissioned by the kings and queens of Europe are full of victories, defeated enemies and heroic moments.

The advent of the First World War in 1914 was viewed by many people at the time as a 'great adventure', and the population of the newly federated country of Australia saw it as the opportunity to stand up and make its mark on the world. This quickly changed once the casualty lists from the first landings at Gallipoli were published in the papers, revealing the true horror of the battlefield. While Gallipoli is considered a 'defining moment' in the building of our national identity, it was but a small skirmish compared to the devastation unleashed in other parts of Europe, especially the fields of France and Flanders (Belgium).

During the months of fighting at Gallipoli, 8,709 Australian soldiers were killed and over 17,000 were wounded. However, Australian troops suffered 5,533 casualties in the first 24 hours of the Battle of Fromelles in 1916, in their first experience of trench warfare on the Western Front. In all, over 60,000 Australians were killed and 156,000 wounded, gassed or taken prisoner during the First World War, and the trauma of this event reverberated throughout Australian society for generations afterwards.

Whole communities around Australia were scarred by the loss or maiming of their young men and women, and the horrific experiences that they brought home with them. Australia's terrible losses were tiny in comparison to those of some other combatants such as Germany, France, Russia and Great

Britain. These countries suffered millions of deaths, numbers that are almost incomprehensible to us today and which continued to affect history throughout the 20th century.

While Gallipoli seems to be still indelibly etched upon our nation's consciousness, places like Pozières, Passchendaele, Villers-Bretonneux, the Somme, Polygon Wood and Fromelles are now more likely to be known as the names of streets and avenues in regional towns and suburbs around Australia than recognised as the places where horrific battles were fought. They are far removed from the thoughts and minds of a generation whose experience of warfare is mostly limited to television news, video games and movies.

Leading artists of the time, such as Arthur Streeton, Harold Septimus Power and Fred Leist, were commissioned between 1914 and 1919 as official war artists to document this massive conflict. Other artists served on the front line as combatants, including Napier Waller, who was terribly wounded, losing his right arm. Their sketches and paintings from this time range from tiny personal memoirs to large-scale genre works that were commissioned to capture a



Metal watercolour paint box that belonged to Sapper L. Vasco, 11 Field Company Engineers, AIF (1882–1918). He enlisted on 11 May 1916, arrived in France on 16 May 1917, was severely injured on 25 May 1918 and died on 3 August 1918 at Herfordshire (UK). He was the son of an artist and had studied art at the National Gallery of Victoria School from 1902–05. The box includes a note, 'This may interest the Goughs, when we were shelled out of our digs my water-colour box stopped one at the Somme.' Australian War Memorial collection

historic moment in 'all its glory', and which have helped to determine how we remember the Great War. These artists probably had lifechanging experiences on the battlefield. Many went on to create works that helped to define the inter-war Australian art world and which are part of our Howard Hinton Collection here at NERAM.

Their wartime experiences were very different from those of the group of leading Australian artists who visited the historical battlefields of France and Belgium in 2017, one hundred years later. Once, these sites were the scenes of desperate fighting involving young volunteer troops from Australia and New Zealand, slaughtering their German counterparts and being slaughtered in turn in the world's first real experience of industrialised warfare. Today, many of these battlefields are serene pastoral scenes comprising fields of crops and livestock, forests, roads, farmhouses, town and villages, with the occasional cemetery or memorial as the only marker that thousands of people died there during the devastating events that occurred a century ago.

Participants in the 2017 artists' expedition – Deirdre Bean, Harrie Fasher, Paul Ferman, Michelle Hiscock, Ross Laurie, Steve Lopes, Euan Macleod, Ian Marr, Idris Murphy, Amanda Penrose Hart, Luke Sciberras and Wendy Sharpe - created works in response to their experiences of these historical sites. Inevitably, they were influenced by the nationalist fervour surrounding the story of ANZAC, nostalgia, personal insights and the knowledge that this terrible conflict was but the first of several wars to ravage the next century of world history.

It is interesting to discover what these artists found out by revisiting these sites, which were indelibly engraved upon our national consciousness a century ago.

In their work they have tried to capture something unique about these special places that hold such significance in our nation's culture and history. These works reflect their personal experiences and the tumultuous emotions evoked by learning more about the events that occurred at these sites.

In this exhibition we join these contemporary artists on their journey to try to make sense of the slaughter, add meaning to the sacrifice and put to rest the ghosts of the past.



Arthur Streeton, *Amiens Cathedral*, 1918, oil on canvas
Australian War Memorial collection



First Australian Division Memorial, Pozieres



Top: Amanda Penrose Hart, Messines Ridge
Bottom: Steve Lopes painting at Messines

DEIRDRE BEAN



Visiting the historic battlefields of the Western Front deeply impressed upon me the horror and futility of war. Descriptions of deprivation, bravery and true heroism stand out, while inscriptions on the memorial crosses, stating the ages of the fallen soldiers so far from home, reveal the true tragedy.

My artistic response was to illustrate elements of war as something incongruously unblemished. That the brutality and harshness of war could be represented as something beautiful motivated me. I turned to research the 'decorative' in art and was inspired by the work of May Morris.

At the time of the First World War, the Arts and Crafts movement was in full swing. May Morris (1862–1938), in the footsteps of her father, English designer William Morris, was producing intricate and detailed compositions. May's work was not unaffected by the war in Europe. Her first Paris exhibition was cancelled because of it. Imagery of Morris' designs in my artwork are metaphorical for the idea of 'home'. I replace carnations and roses with cornflowers and poppies, the memorial flora of France and Australia.

My paintings are in response to visiting the battlefields of the Somme Valley and Belgium. The bugle's call is one that continues to be associated with wartime sacrifices. As we listen we cannot help but remember those who fell. Homing pigeons were invaluable during the war and were used to convey vital information. Many became decorated war heroes, having saved thousands of lives. Poppies and cornflowers displayed in a decorative exploded artillery shell suggest the tension between the destructive and the delightful.

France and Belgium have a long tradition of lacemaking and embroidery. During the war, women embroidered postcards to sell to foreign soldiers as mementos. Up to one million were produced, mostly handmade. In response, I embroidered poppies, cornflowers and bullets, incorporating text sourced from original postcards and soldiers' diaries. Hand embroidering is time-consuming and meditative, not unlike the process by which I paint.

Deirdre Bean is represented by Stella Downer Fine Art Sydney and Mitchell Fine Art Brisbane.



Coming home, 2017, watercolour on Arches 300gsm hot-pressed paper, 45 x 34 cm



Homekeeping, 2017, watercolour on Arches 300gsm hot-pressed paper, 40 x 30 cm
Opposite: Deirdre painting, Le Hamel, 29 April 2017





Call to home, 2017, watercolour and graphite on Arches 300gsm hot-pressed paper, 34 x 50 cm



All quiet, 2017, polyester, rayon and cotton embroidered on synthetic fabric, stitched to paper, 20 x 15 cm



Bullecourt



Luke Sciberras, Ross Laurie and Harrie Fasher painting in Bullecourt



Ross Laurie about to be covered in dust, Bullecourt

HARRIE FASHER



Harrie Fasher is an Australian artist making her mark in sculpture. Working from Oberon, NSW, her studio is a hive of activity, in which she produces steel sculptures that embody tension and movement. She uses both abstraction and figurative form – predominantly that of the horse – to convey her message. Manipulating steel as her primary medium, the sculptures are three-dimensional 'drawings' that illicit an emotional response from the viewer.

The mental and physical power of the horse is core to Fasher's work, belying her history as an equestrian athlete. The sculptures display an innate knowledge of the animal; nuances of the horse and the unique bond between horse and human.

The realities of war, the destruction and ensuing mental anguish, are concepts explored through Fasher's work. *Our Light Horse*, a public sculpture in Oberon's main street, was commissioned for the Anzac Centenary in 2014. In 2017, she produced a memorial to the Battle of Beersheeba, *The Last Charge*, for Bondi's 'Sculpture by the Sea'. The sculpture won Fasher the Helen Lempriere Scholarship, the Andrea Stretton Memorial prize and the Artists' Choice Award, and was described by art critic John McDonald "as easily the most impressive work in the show".

Through the Western Front tour she has explored all elements of her practice. Plein air drawings made on the trip describe the visceral history embedded in the landscape. Sculptures, constructed in the studio, explore materials found on the battlefield and the loss of human life, animals and history. Steel, concrete and wire are embedded with earth, ash, bone and rope. The form is abstracted, modelled and carved, conveying the harrowing experience of combat and desperate destruction of war.

Fasher has work in public and private collections both in Australia and internationally. She has an extensive exhibition history, with a seminal sculpture central to the National Museum of Australia's 'Spirited: Australia's Horse Story' exhibition.

Harrie Fasher is represented by King Street Gallery on William.



Their screams penetrate, 2017, Steel (rod, mesh and wire), cement, ash, hessian and twine, 33 x 44 x 17.5 cm



They shoot horses don't they?, 2017, Steel (rod, mesh and wire), cement, ash, hessian and twine, 19 x 56 x 13.5 cm





Monash valued life; Battle of Amiens, 2017, ink, acrylic and charcoal on paper, 32.5 x 48 cm



The wood vanished; pounded to pieces, 2017, charcoal, graphite, acrylic and pastel on paper, 27.5 x 47 cm



The red baron brought down, 2017, charcoal, graphite, acrylic and pastel on paper, 32 x 49.5 cm

The hell where youth and laughter go



Brad Manera

Historian, Anzac Memorial, Hyde Park, Sydney

‘The hell where youth and laughter go’ was how poet and infantry officer Siegfried Sassoon MC described the Western Front. The Western Front is the most well-known and infamous battlefield of the Great War. It stretched over hundreds of kilometres in a continuous, shell-torn strip from the Swiss frontier, through France and Belgium, to the North Sea. It was where the great armies of the Central Powers, led by Imperial Germany, were locked in deadly combat with those of the western allies including France, Britain and her dominions, and eventually the United States.

Between late 1914 and the Armistice in November 1918, some 13 million soldiers and civilians were killed or badly wounded on the Western Front. It was there that much of a way of life that had existed in Europe for centuries fell before modern weapons that were the products and processes of the Industrial Revolution.

For the soldiers who fought there, the Western Front was remembered for trench warfare with its horrors of massive artillery barrages, clouds of poison gas, the incessant deadly chatter of machine guns and belts of impenetrable barbed wire. They lived and died in holes in the ground connected by deep corridors carved in the earth. They froze in winter, baked in summer and spent the between months mired in mud. It was a landscape of unspeakable horrors where men and animals were mutilated, homes and cities obliterated and verdant farmlands turned to a stark moonscape.

It was also a place of extraordinary acts of courage and self-sacrifice.



Those who survived found it difficult to tell those who had not been there what it was like. The questions could not be silenced. The families of those who fought and fell demanded answers.

A generation of artists, official and unofficial, offered their interpretations. German veterans like Wilhelm Otto Dix and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner painted nightmare scenes that would be banned by the Nazis. Frenchman François Flameng would earn the Legion d'Honneur for his paintings of scenes from the front. Henry Eric Kennington served in the British Expeditionary Force before being wounded, then returned to the front and contributed to the work of dozens of British official war artists who included talents like William Orpen and CRW Nevinson. Theodore Joseph Bastien served with the Belgian Army and painted the Canadian Expeditionary Force as they fought in his homeland. American illustrator Frank Schoonover made images of the doughboys arriving in France.

Australia sent some of its finest artists. A fortnight after the Armistice a group of them opened an exhibition at the Royal Academy with the title ‘Peace and

War’. In a review of the exhibition in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 25 January 1919, *The British Australasian* was quoted saying “no purely imaginative battle pictures can move us as do these careful portrayals of the daily life for over four years of the young manhood of Australia, and the places that they have carried with them into history. If Australia had nothing but ... Streeton's [paintings] of France and Flanders, and Dyson's lithograph of the Western front, she would still possess a collection unique for its historical and artistic value. In Will Dyson's powerful drawings we have pre-eminently the spirit of the war and the spirit of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). His is the personal note, and nothing could give us a more vivid impression of the burden and misery of war, and the inexhaustible dog-patience of the men who fought in it”.

The Australian artists of the Great War were an extraordinarily diverse group. The most famous of them included Frank Crozier, Will Dyson, George Lambert, Fred Leist, Will Longstaff, Septimus Power and Arthur Streeton. Official historian Charles Bean described how Will Dyson “loved to get forward to the company or battery officers or men, studying their characters even more than their faces,

and living with the people and among the places that he drew”. Dyson himself was profoundly affected by watching the impact of grief on the young soldiers of the AIF. The wartime correspondence of Arthur Streeton on the other hand was usually upbeat. In a letter to Captain HC Smart in June 1918, for example, he wrote “it's extremely novel and exciting over here and it's the only way in which to form any idea of Australian manhood – it's marvellous what great fellows they all are: the best comes out of everything over here” – all while making the most graphic paintings of smashed war materiel and war-torn landscapes.

The guns fell silent on the Western Front a century ago and the last of the men who heard them is long dead. Most of the trenches have been filled in and ploughed over. The towns have been rebuilt and the land is productive again. All that remains is the occasional concrete emplacement and the too frequent Commonwealth War Graves commission cemeteries. But the names of these places – such as Ypres, Passchendaele, Flanders, Arras, Pozières, Villers-Bretonneux, Amiens, Mont St Quentin, Péronne and the Somme Valley – live on and have become places of pilgrimage.

It is right that they call to a new generation of artists from Australia and New Zealand to interpret this landscape and its ghosts again.

This group of artists have studied in their own way the events of 1914–18. They have investigated the lives of ancestors they never knew, some of whom still lie beneath these foreign fields. They have walked the green rolling hills of Picardy, seen the languid trickle of the Somme and explored the ancient battlements around the rebuilt city of Ieper, which was formerly known as Ypres. It was at the heart of the deadly salient, or bulge, that the Allied forces had pushed into the German front line. They viewed these bucolic vistas burdened with the knowledge of the great tragedy that had befallen this land. They battled with interpreting a balance between France and Belgium in the 21st century and the France and Belgium that is remembered on war memorials in the Antipodes. This is their work.

This exhibition reminds us that the echoes of the Great War generation have not died and that there is always worth in revisiting the places in which great deeds were done.

PAUL FERMAN



The weeks spent on the Western Front tore my heart out. I knew some of the history, although being in the trenches, walking the battle lines, knowing thousands had died where I stood, chilled me. I could not believe that men did this.

The innovation back then was the ability to kill on an industrial scale. Technological advances had allowed for the construction of superior methods of extermination: machine guns unleashing hails of bullets, long-range artillery, aerial bombardment. Weaponry and methods of warfare were more advanced in Germany, but considered less important by the British and French military leaders, or in the words of Britain's General Haig, "over-rated". Haig was nicknamed The Butcher of the Somme.

Historically, the First World War would be the last hurrah for many European monarchies, absorbed as they were by vanity and imagined slights, less-than-stellar IQs, poorly built alliances – chess by children, a house of cards. With the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, Kaiser Wilhelm II, though reticent to go

to war, was undermined by his generals, who lusted for battle and 'glory'. The encircling alliances, precipitated by the Kaiser's clumsy pre-war diplomacy, had so worried an increasingly nervous German elite that it spent years expanding the military, including creating purpose-built railways to its borders, to allow the prompt delivery of soldiers to battle in unprecedented numbers. As usual, the massive and vast majority of deaths, on all sides, would be the ordinary people.

When war was declared, it was disheartening and infuriating to see the press and the populations of Europe exult in the declaration of toxic, exploitative nationalism. Perhaps war allowed an alternative freedom, broke down barriers, made the scent of life exhilarating. Paris was said to never have been so vibrant. The air was sweeter, more intense. Odd that we need imminent death to feel more alive.

In an episode of the television quiz show QI, Stephen Fry posed the question of how many people nowadays in Europe are related to Charlemagne (742–814)? Answer: everyone. So, it would seem nationalism is merely a construct, used by a political elite to serve themselves and the captains of industry. America had 21 new millionaires at the end of the war. There were only five in 1913.

I remain humbled by the energy, relentless courage, resourcefulness and tenacity of the 'ordinary' people and the troops of all nations. I grieve for their families, my own included, and I am disgusted by the disregard with which the British command tossed endless men to their gruesome deaths, to little or no result. It was a time demarcated by dismal planning, poor communications, zero learning from earlier Western Front debacles, class promoted over ability. There were so few leaders like General Monash, considered one of the best Allied generals of the war and the most famous commander in Australian history, who instilled the sense of teamwork and respect in his officers. Monash felt responsible for every life.

The war to end all wars, really? Not till the next one. Why do we tolerate such poor irresponsible government?

Paul Ferman is represented by King Street Gallery on William.



#373 *Messines 1917*, 2017, lambda print, 175 x 375 cm



#370 *Fromelles 1916*, 2017, lambda print, 175 x 375 cm



#376 Villers-Bretonneux 1918, 2017, lambda print, 175 x 375 cm



#374 Passchendaele, 2017, lambda print, 175 x 375 cm (detail)



#372 Bullecourt, 2017, lambda print, 175 x 375 cm



Villers-Bretonneux, France

MICHELLE HISCOCK



Michelle Hiscock trained at the Canberra School of Art, Australian National University, graduating in 1991. Her early work, of small but powerfully evocative landscapes, was well received by both collectors and critics, and she has continued since then to develop her pictorial language, exploring the traditions of classical landscape from a contemporary perspective.

Painting and drawing from nature are central to Michelle's work but she is equally concerned with poetic transformation through memory and imagination. Much of her work evolves out of returning to sites over many years, in the vicinity of Sydney, where she lives, or near the family home on the Shoalhaven River. She also draws inspiration from time spent in France and

Italy, retracing the footsteps of landscape masters such as Corot and Claude Lorrain. Michelle has held solo exhibitions in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide, has been a finalist in several art prizes, and has taken part in group shows in Australia, London and Switzerland. Her work is represented in private and corporate collections in Australia and the U.K.

Michelle Hiscock is represented by Australian Galleries Sydney.



The Menin Gate, 2017, watercolour on paper, 20.5 x 25.5 cm



Pool of peace



The Tree at Caterpillar Crater, 2017, watercolour and gouache on paper, 38 x 28 cm



ROSS LAURIE



Having seen the photographs of the Western Front by Frank Hurley, I felt a familiarity with some of his images.

As a child I had helped light fires on land where bulldozers were clearing; and saw the churned-up earth littered with detritus, and of course the fires and the smoke.

I knew what dead animals smelt like and how flesh rotted.

So the photos of the dead horses littered about roads, and the chaos and mess and flies, did not require a great leap of the imagination.

However, the knowledge that the ground held dead and dismembered soldiers churned up within it, and the thought of the noise and rats and fear and the huge numbers of dead and missing, left me, like many, shaking my head in disbelief.

Boys from my town, like many others, died on many of these battlefields.

How does one paint such a thing?

Ross Laurie is represented by King Street Gallery on William.

Small Battlefield, 2013, oil on canvas, 40 x 160 cm



Small Battlefield (panel 1 of 4)





Corbie-Le Hamel 1, 2017, gouache, 13 x 41 cm



Battlefield, 2017, oil on canvas, 100 x 260 cm



Passchendaele I, 2017, oil on canvas, 100 x 260 cm



Passchendaele II, 2017, oil on canvas, 100 x 260 cm



German bunker, Fromelles



German cemetery

STEVE LOPES



Steve Lopes is a figurative painter with work in the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. He uses the landscape as a vehicle to investigate human existence.

Born in 1971, he has studied at the London Print Studio, the Art Students League of New York and the College of Fine Arts at the University of New South Wales. He lived for a number of years in London. Since 1996, Lopes has exhibited extensively, with more than 35 solo exhibitions in Australia, London, Hong Kong and New Zealand.

He has also exhibited in numerous curated touring exhibitions, including 'Your Friend The Enemy' and 'Not the Way Home' featuring prominent Australian



artists. He is a frequent finalist in national art awards and has completed many artist residencies around the world. His work is held in public and private collections including those of Parliament House, Canberra; BHP Billiton, Sydney; the Bundanon Trust; University of Wollongong; Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery; University of Melbourne Library; Broken Hill Regional Gallery; ANU Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra; Waiheke Regional Gallery, Auckland; Time Warner, New York; Rolls Royce, London; and British Biotech, Oxford (UK).

Steve Lopes is represented by Stella Downer Fine Art Sydney, Mitchell Fine Art Brisbane, Colville Gallery Tasmania and Linton & Kay Galleries, Perth.



Flat Markers, Langemark (West Flanders), 2017, oil on board, 40 x 50 cm



From Beaumont - Hamel, 2017, oil on board, 40 x 50 cm



Ypres Salient - Passchendaele, 2017, oil on board, 45 x 45 cm



Le Hamel, 2017, oil on board, 40 x 50 cm



Exposed wood, Mont St Quentin, 2017, oil on canvas, 140 x 160 cm

EUAN MACLEOD



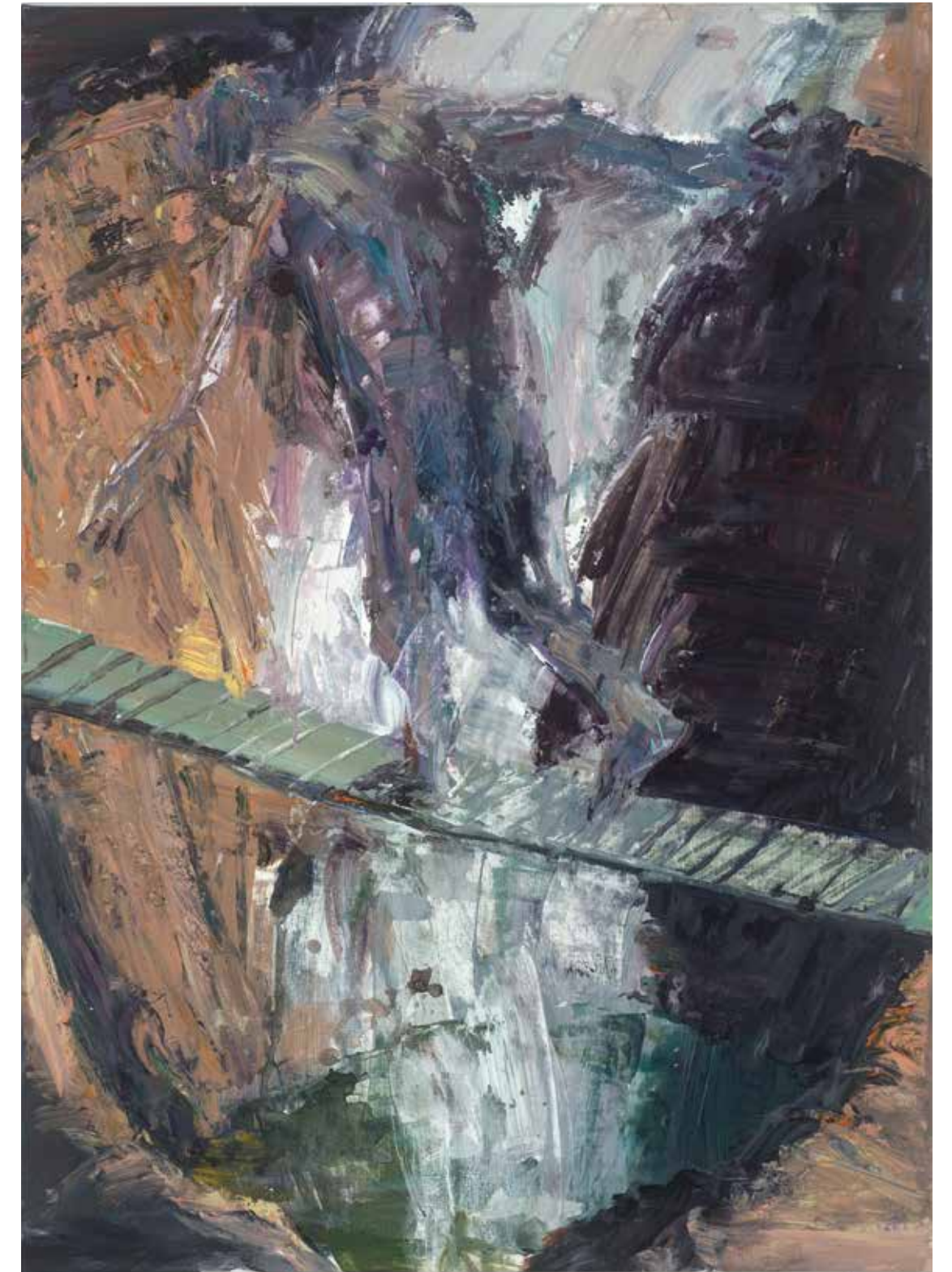
Born in New Zealand, Euan Macleod moved to Australia in 1981 and has exhibited in both countries as a respected senior artist. He was the winner of the Archibald Prize in 1999.

His paintings and drawings are in public collections in Australia and overseas, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Australian Parliament House Art Collection; National Gallery of Australia; the National Gallery of Victoria; AGNSW; and Museum of NZ Te Papa Tongarewa.

Macleod is best known for his dark, expressive landscapes. Wrung out of muted colours and heavy textures, people and landscapes emerge. Plein air landscape is an important feature of his work.

Euan Macleod is represented by Niagara Galleries Melbourne and Watters Gallery Sydney.

Crossing smoking hole, 2017, acrylic on linen, 110 x 79.5 cm





The Wellington Tunnels, Arras, France



Heaven and Hell, 2017, oil on polyester, 100 x 124 cm



Moving forward, 2017, oil on polyester, 150 x 180 cm



Golem (Flanders), 2017, acrylic on polyester, 100 x 124 cm

IAN MARR



A century on, the Western Front battlefields exert a profound effect on visitors. The agricultural landscape is a prairie of corn, potatoes and canola, with few people and great machines trundling around, yet the stories and familial connections to the appalling events of the First World War are strong, and the sites evocative. As we travelled, I drew on copper plates, preparing for paintings that looked at the fields, cemeteries and atmospheres of this old site of European conflict.

The work on stone for this exhibition, *Three medallions after Simonides for Hill 60*, uses letter-cutter's skills to link the ancient and modern psychology of war.

An important element, from an Australian artist's perspective, is nostalgia for home. Writer D.H. Lawrence, travelling by ship to Australia, was told by a returning Australian soldier that the sound of rain on the corrugated iron roofs of the trenches made him unbearably homesick for Australia.

Then and now, neither the hundreds of spires of village churches nor the soft beauty of European woodlands, birds and fields offer much that is substantial to Australian hearts, except the vanishing memories of family members, among the never-ending cemeteries.

Ian Marr is represented by Stella Downer Fine Art Sydney.



Three medallions after Simonides for Hill 60, Battle of Messines, Ypres, 2017, Mintaro Slate, 50 cm diameter



Three medallions after Simonides for Hill 60, Battle of Messines, Ypres 2, 2017, Mintaro Slate, 50 cm diameter



Three medallions after Simonides for Hill 60, Battle of Messines, Ypres 3, 2017, Mintaro Slate, 50 cm diameter



Near Flers, the Somme, 2017, oil on copper, 10 x 70 cm



Beaumont-Hamel, 2017, oil on copper, 10 x 70 cm



Passchendaele Ridge from Polygon Wood, 2017, oil on copper, 15 x 90 cm



DULCE ET DECORUM, 2017, Mintaro Slate, 170 x 30 cm



The Windmill, Pozières, France

One does not soon forget...



Christopher Allen
National Art Critic, *The Australian*

When I was a child, both World Wars were much closer than they are today. There were still thousands of living veterans of the Great War, who were then only in their late sixties or early seventies. And the younger generation that had taken part in the Second World War and survived was, for the most part, in the prime of life; they were, in fact, my parents’ age.

Both my grandfathers were in the First War. Arthur Samuel Allen (1894–1959), my paternal grandfather, had joined the new Australian army before the war and was commissioned in 1913. In 1915, he was sent to Egypt and in 1916, now a captain, he was on the Western Front. He led his men under massive German bombardment at Pozières in August. He was awarded the DSO for his courage and leadership at the battle of Messines in the summer of 1917 and was promoted to major, commanding the 45th Battalion at the battle of Dernancourt; promoted again to lieutenant colonel at only 24, he led the 48th Battalion during the attempt to take Monument Wood near Villers-Bretonneux.

Between the wars, Arthur, known affectionately to his men as Tubby, was a partner in an accountancy firm, but remained in the army reserve, where he rose to the rank of Brigadier. At the outbreak of the Second World War, he took the first Australian troops to North Africa, fighting the Italians and Germans there and then the Germans in Greece, before leading the 7th Division to defeat the Vichy French in Syria. Promoted to Major General, he was then recalled to take command of the battle against the Japanese on the Kokoda Track.

When I was a little boy, I would often meet his veterans, who would shake my hand and tell me what a good man he had been. They knew that he considered it his highest duty to ensure the safety of his men and never to lose a life unnecessarily. This was a belief inspired by his experience of the horrifying death toll he had witnessed in the First World War, and it eventually brought him into conflict with the Allied Supreme Commander in the Pacific, General Douglas MacArthur. The American general, who had far less experience of command in the field and a more coldly calculating perspective, notoriously complained that my grandfather’s casualty lists were too low to suggest he was making a serious effort to prosecute the campaign.

Sadly, I never met Tubby. I was only a little boy, and our family was living in London, when he died prematurely, in 1959, his health broken by his arduous service in two wars, at the age of 64. He had never been a desk officer like so many others; from Lieutenant to General, he had always led his men in the field. His last years, in spite of a happier period living in Egypt immediately after the war, were shadowed by disappointment and a sense of having been let down at the climax of his military career by an Australian military establishment who chose to comply servilely with the wishes of MacArthur.

I was fortunate to know my other grandfather, my mother’s father, for most of my adolescent years. Maitland Richard Stanley Paine (1896–1975) was a cultivated man who had once had a fine baritone voice and who still, when I knew him, recalled long passages of Shakespeare by heart. He had taken a copy of the plays with him to the trenches of the Great War; a fellow soldier painted a watercolour of the troopship that carried them to France on the flyleaf. His small library also included most of the great English poets, as well as Homer, Marcus Aurelius and other authors.

Stanley enlisted in 1916 and was nearly killed in a gas attack in 1917. He describes the events of that day in a remarkable letter written to his father in early 1918, several months after the battle. It is a touching document by a young man with a zest for writing who manages to convey a vivid image of the reality of trench warfare while downplaying, for his father’s benefit, the suffering that he personally endured. My wife Michelle Hiscock read this letter to the present group of artists when they were standing at this very site.



Euan Macleod at the Wellington Tunnels, Arras

On the 12th [of October] the great attack before Passchendaele took place, and we, with all the other troops, were badly cut about.

I don't like to say much about this day, and it would have broken your heart to have seen our lads lying about after the attack. Getting the wounded out was terrible work, as it was necessary to go through miles of mud to get back to the first aid posts. My God, this was a sorry business. The shelling everywhere was red-hot and had been before the attack. All day on the 12th the sky rained a hell on the earth, and this was only part of the affair. Machine guns, bombs and rifles took a heavy toll... There were no duck-boards or tracks, just straight into the mud. Every few yards we had to stop to pull someone out of it.

On the following day, Stanley and his companions were relieved, but his gas mask was lost in the confusion of pulling out. As they withdrew a mustard gas attack struck them, and he had no mask.

Ultimately I got one, but it was too late, for the mustard gas had got me properly... Afterwards, I'd rather not say anything about it... But I'm going back to France again. After being gassed I lay on a stretcher at a Canadian Clearing Station for ten days at Peperinghe, then for three days at the Third Australian General Hospital at Boulogne, thence across to Dover and on to Chester, where my good constitution pulled me out of hospital in four months. But one does not soon forget what one sees in France, and when I get out of this camp, and things generally are a lot better with me than at present, I'm going back. They often call for volunteers to fill up the drafts going to France, so you may depend I'll squeeze in somewhere.

Stanley's physical constitution was indeed strong: the doctors in England had warned him that his lungs were so badly damaged that he would be unlikely to live past 40, but he ended up dying a few days before his 79th birthday. In that respect, he was more fortunate than Tubby; but the psychological injuries that he suffered proved more grievous in the longer run, blighting the remainder of his life. Like most veterans of war, he rarely spoke about his experiences, but among all the horrors that he witnessed, it seems that he was particularly scarred by killing a young German soldier of his own age in hand-to-hand combat with a bayonet.

During his convalescence, Stanley was haunted by nightmares. He had a recurring dream in which he was fighting a German soldier who had him by the throat and was strangling him. The psychologist advised him to fight back, and that night he dreamt he was in turn strangling the German, clasping his hands in his sleep in a desperate struggle until he snapped his own thumb and awoke in blinding pain.

But that was not the end of it. Although he was professionally successful after the war, the trauma he had endured left him with deep anxiety and he suffered a series of crippling breakdowns throughout my mother's childhood; he was too ill to attend her wedding. He was eventually on medication that controlled the anxiety but left him somewhat remote. He would read until late in the night and when we stayed with them in the country I would sometimes meet him in the kitchen, making himself a glass of rum and milk beside the old wood stove, if I was also reading late; we had long talks, but seldom about the war.

The experience of war is not easy to talk about without falling into sentimentality, banality or disingenuousness. Like the experience of death, to which it is so closely related, it is the encounter with a kind of absolute beyond words. As far as art is concerned, several approaches were taken by Australian war artists at the time, from reconstructing the action of a battle to allegorical evocations of sacrifice and finally simple depictions of the battlefields themselves.

Even in the earliest depictions of battlefields, like Streeton's Mount Saint-Quentin (1919), we are struck by the strange peace that has descended on places that were so recently scenes of unimaginable carnage. When artists visit these places today, a century after the war, it is above all the spectacle of regeneration that is remarkable. Humans do not regenerate in the same way as nature; they die and are succeeded by others, who must strive to recall the experience of their forefathers. The artist, communing with the present life of nature and its perennial force of renewal, simultaneously remembers the folly, tragedy, courage and sacrifice of a humanity long perished, yet whose bones remain scattered throughout this earth.

IDRIS MURPHY



These paintings are the outcome of a painting trip, visiting sites on the Western Front in both France and Belgium, which I cannot easily extricate from recollections of my two separate trips to Gallipoli in previous years.

Before considering any writing that I might add in relation to my paintings, there is a series of problems, not the least of which for the artist is confronting views of battlefields 100 years after the event. And then, what can be said that still has any meaning; outside the paintings themselves which throw up their own contradictions.

However, three quotes do come to mind, which far outstrip any words that I might add.

The first comes from an essay by French philosopher Simone Weil called 'The Iliad, or the Poem of Force'.

'Such is the nature of force. Its power to transform a man into a thing is double and cuts both ways; it petrifies differently, but equally, the souls of those who suffer it and those who wield it.'

The second is from American writer Susan Sontag, from her essay 'An Argument About Beauty', in which she introduces, a letter written by a German soldier standing guard in the Russian winter in late December 1942.

'The most beautiful Christmas I had ever seen, made entirely of disinterested emotion and stripped of all tawdry trimmings. I was all alone beneath an enormous starred sky, and I can remember a tear running down my frozen cheek, a tear neither of pain nor of joy but of emotion created by intense experience.'

Finally, a transcript of part of a letter written by my grandfather, Idris Charles Pike, in Gallipoli on September 18, 2015.

'We had some fun in the trenches this morning, as you know only a few yards separates us from the Turks, so we threw some tinned beef and jam over to them, they soon raked them in to their trenches, and in return they threw tobacco and cigarette papers. A couple of the parcels had notes in them written in French, one ran something to this effect. Our Friends the Enemy.'

I hope the paintings add to the conversation.

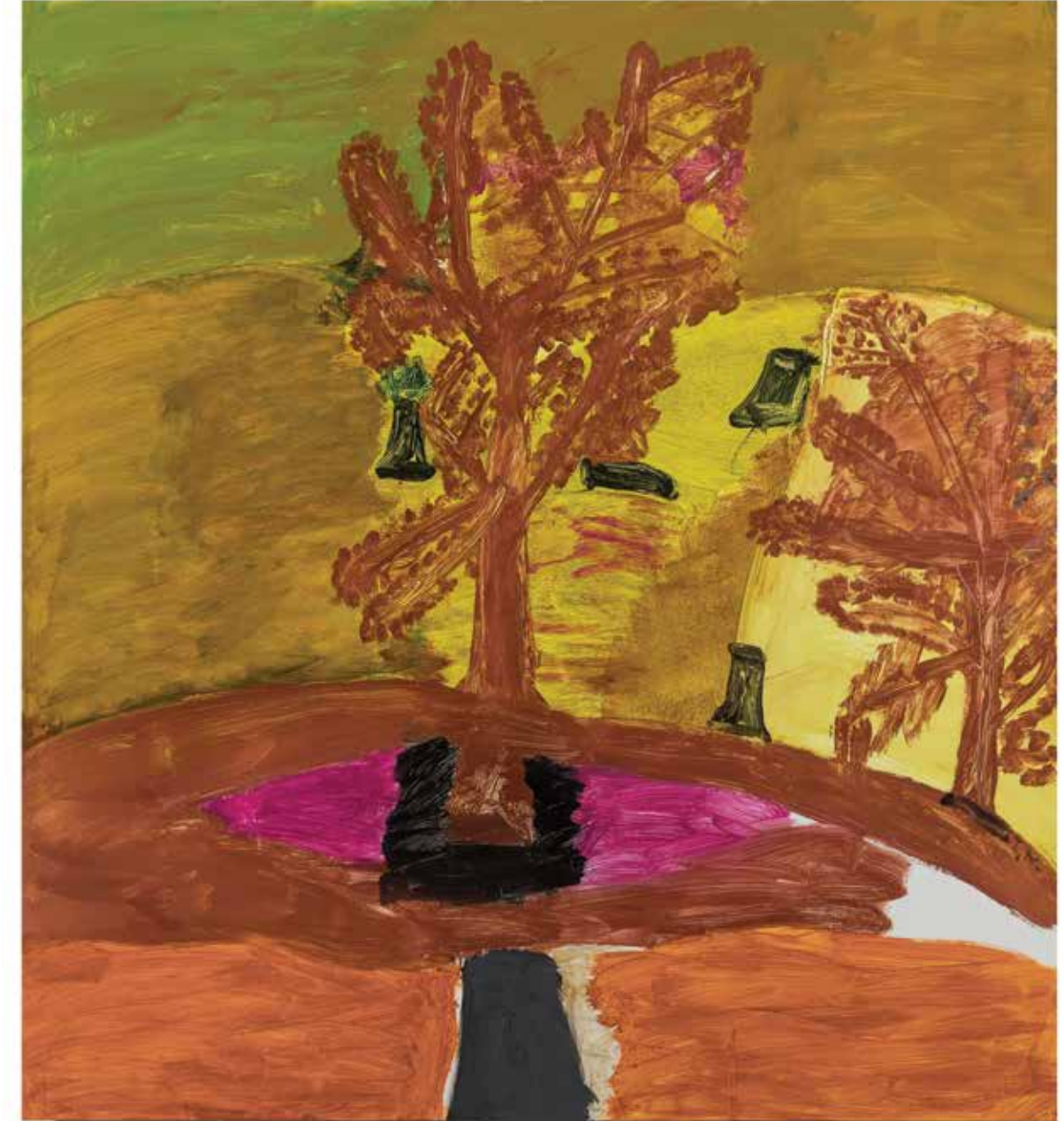
Idris Murphy is represented by King Street Gallery on William.



View from inside, 2017, acrylic on board, 40 x 40 cm



Somewhere in France 1, 2017, acrylic and collage on aluminium, 151 x 141 cm



Somewhere in France 2, 2017, acrylic and collage on aluminium, 151 x 141 cm



Top: *Evening series 1*, 2017, acrylic and collage on board, 24 x 31 cm
 Bottom left: *Evening series 2*, 2017, acrylic on board, 24 x 31 cm
 Bottom right: *Evening series 3*, 2017, acrylic and collage on board, 24 x 31 cm



Idris painting near a sink hole



Top: Bill Nuttal, Mouquet Farm
Bottom: Views of Mouquet Farm



Mouquet Farm memorial

AMANDA PENROSE HART



Amanda Penrose Hart won the Gallipoli Art Prize in 2017. Her artwork, *The Sphinx Perpetual Peace*, is now part of the permanent Gallipoli Art Prize collection. The Australian Parliament House in Canberra also purchased her diptych *Gallipoli Peninsula*. Her work can also be found in the collections of the Australia Club, the National Maritime Museum, Macquarie Bank, Clayton UTZ, Allens, The University of Sydney and the Sydney Law Courts.

Penrose Hart's upbringing in suburban Brisbane inspired her appreciation for quintessentially Australian, dry-humoured and 'homely' items, such as vintage Australian caravans and garden gnomes, which mainly featured in her earlier works.



Her work documents multiple journeys through rural New South Wales, New Zealand and France, and to the shores of Gallipoli, and as a result, the subject matter has adapted. Now, the vivid seascapes and landscapes viewed on her many journeys readily manifest in her practice and compositions.

Amanda Penrose Hart is represented by King Street Gallery on William, ReDot Fine Art Gallery, Singapore and Mitchell Fine Art, Brisbane.



Australian first division memorial, Pozieres, 2017, oil on linen, 41 x 62 cm



Messines ridge, 2017, oil on linen, 41 x 62 cm



The Somme 2, 2017, oil on canvas, 14 x 32 cm



Mouquet Farm, 2017, oil on canvas, 80 x 100 cm



Corbie, 2017, oil on canvas, 120 x 300 cm



Amanda drawing at the German cemetery

LUKE SCIBERRAS



Immersed in the picturesque landscape of northern France and Belgium, it is an uncomfortable struggle to imagine in the very same place the catastrophic events of the First World War. One hundred years doesn't seem so long ago when one considers that the entire form of the land was torn inside out . As with mining , elemental forces and the ravages of industry, war scours a landscape clean but leaves an invisible stain, and every terrain holds a deep tissue memory.

When war correspondent and historian Charles Bean wrote back to Australia from the battlefield of Bullecourt he described the German bullets glancing off the miles of barbed wire that snagged scores of Australian soldiers, resembling fireflies illuminating the landscape. I was struck that an unimaginably

harrowing event can actually be represented by something quite beautiful and paradoxically serene. A chord too is struck in the knowledge that artist Rex Battarbee was salvaged from the mud at Bullecourt and it was during his convalescence that he learned the watercolour technique that would inspire an entire genre of painting in the Central Desert via artists he taught, such as Albert Namatjira and Otto Pareroultja.

There is, in the long gestation of a painting, or a series of works, an angle from which one can reconcile a visual expression of a long-fought and long-ago conflict. A European landscape that holds a strong and complex Australian history is in itself some strange contradiction, but the memorials on every central square of every village in that region are a testament to the enduring importance the French and Belgian people place upon their antipodean comrades.

Just as a painting is a kind of poetic devotion, the painter and the viewer meet in reflection with hindsight and foresight, where loss and destruction meet with something new that has a life all its own.

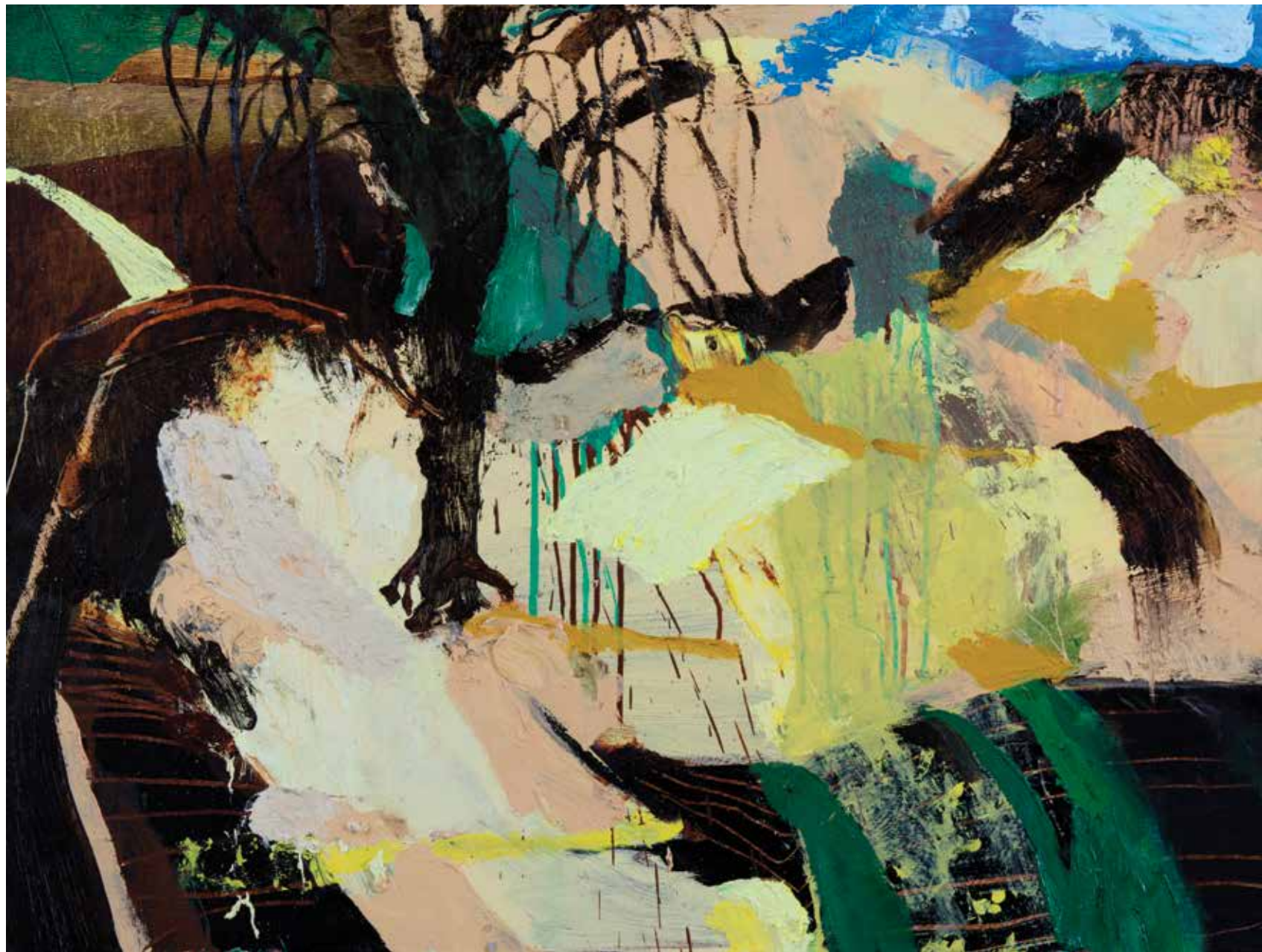
Luke Sciberras is represented by King Street Gallery on William and Scott Livesey galleries.



Hill Sixty, 2017, oil on board, 120 x 160 cm



Fireflies, Bullecourt, 2017, oil on board, 160 x 360 cm



On the Somme, 2017, oil on board, 60 x 85 cm



Polygon Wood, 2017, oil on board, 60 x 85 cm

WENDY SHARPE



I saw an intriguing photograph of Australian artist Evelyn Chapman in an incongruous setting – wearing a sun hat, sitting at an easel, and painting the remnants of a bombed church. Chapman travelled around the battle sites of the Western Front just after the end of the First World War, painting among the ruins. I felt a link with her, from my own experience as an official war artist, working in the destroyed towns and cities in East Timor. I researched Chapman's archives at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and obtained copies of her photographs of the ruins from her travels, visiting some of the same rebuilt sites.

I was surprised how present the war still is. Reminders of the war are everywhere, and many of the towns of northern France and Belgium were

almost completely destroyed and later rebuilt. During the tour, I decided not to work directly in each site, but to experience each place and then return to the hotel to work from memory. I tried not to be literal, but rather imbue each painting with how I felt about the locations.

I painted small gouaches of the idyllic countryside with the fields of crops and yellow canola of today, while conveying a sense that this was a site where horrific events once took place. I was fascinated by solitary farmhouses in the middle of these fields, and imagined what it would be like to live there today, knowing that you are surrounded by vestiges of the war (approximately for every square metre in the Somme, 14 people died on the battlefields). They are still constantly finding fragments of bodies, shrapnel and artifacts.

I had the opportunity to visit the Vladslo German War Cemetery in Belgium, to see the extraordinary sculptures *Grieving Parents* by Käthe Kollwitz, something I have always wanted to see. These sculptures depict Kollwitz and her husband not only grieving over the grave of their son Peter, but also over all of the dead in front of them. A very moving experience, reminding us of the universal nature of grief and loss.

Wendy Sharpe is represented by King Street Gallery on William and Philip Bacon Galleries.



Self portrait with Menin Gate, 2017, oil on linen, 120 x 140 cm



Abblain Saint Nazaire, 2017, oil on canvas, 100 x 125 cm



Cloth Hall Ypres, 2017, oil on canvas, 100 x 125 cm



Evelyn Chapman with ruined church, 2017, oil on canvas, 125 x 100 cm



Grieving Parents, 2017, oil on canvas, 100 x 92 cm

Why we paint



Dr Andrew Yip

Art historian

‘Salient’ is an exhibition that is paradoxically both a tragedy and a necessity. It is a tragedy because it takes as its subject ‘the war to end all wars’, and yet a century later Australian forces are engaged in the same theatres their forebears traversed. It is a necessity because it is the almost singular responsibility of the artist to look back with open eyes at the causes and consequences of war, and its aftermath.

Death and sorrow are the constant companions of war art, but war art does not always fetishise violence and tragedy. At its best it tugs against the boundary between humanity and its antithesis, between myth and reality, such as in the work of Euan Macleod. In *Heaven and Hell*, emaciated drones stand for the tortured souls of hopeless soldiers. Machine-like and programmed, they ironically rise from the comparative safety of their dugout into the firestorm of hell. In *Golem (Flanders)*, a monstrous automaton, created by the ingenuity of man-made war, rises from a trench to menace lost souls.

Nor does the passing of time necessarily mean that war’s hard lessons become subsumed by empty, nationalist platitudes. Strangely, time and distance allow for complexity to be teased out—for example, in the works of Deidre Bean which, in their stillness, vibrancy and intricacy, are as beautiful as our accompanying aesthetic pleasure is unsettling. In *Coming Home*, the iridescent green and purple neck feathers of a homing pigeon speak of life, diversity and natural order, though the message case on its back is evidence of a different hierarchy altogether. It is beautifully patterned, a work of art, an exquisite object of

admiration. It reminds us that guns, bombs and shell casings—like the exploded fragment in *Homecoming* that is repurposed as a domestic vase—are themselves man-made artefacts.

Importantly, Bean’s work adds another perspective to the sightlines of war. Her aesthetic comes from the Arts and Crafts movement, and in particular the work of May Morris, daughter of William. Bean’s gesture foregrounds the voices of women on home fronts and battlefields, how they suffered and survived, disenfranchised from the political systems that caused the conflict.

So too does the work of Wendy Sharpe, herself formerly a commissioned Australian official war artist. The lurid colours and bold architectures of Sharpe’s *Cloth Hall Ypres* brings to mind the aesthetic experiments and high-keyed palette of a forgotten Australian modernist artist, Evelyn Chapman. Chapman was one of the first artists to paint the ruins of the Somme, even as they still smouldered and as bodies of German soldiers lay rotting in dugouts. Chapman’s legacy—curtailed by family, marriage and propriety—is given voice in Sharpe’s bold portrait of her. Her face is a swatch of bright colour and her hands seem to be made from the stuff of paint itself, as if to announce that—of course—the work of her generation of Australian women painters was crucial to the formation of Australian history.



This is one of the quirks of the shared, brutal experience of war. It tends to bind context to country, to become embedded in the narratives and histories of all of its combatants. Symbols become shared and inherited between war and culture: the rising sun, the cross, the horse, the church. In this exhibition we can tease out familiar threads with particular meaning.

Harrie Fasher’s post-apocalyptic sculptures bridge battlefield and home front. In her troubling *Their Screams Penetrate*, it is difficult not to see the writhing, desiccated horses that Sidney Nolan and Albert Tucker painted serially in the 1950s. Theirs was a surrealist tragedy of drought and post-war anxiety in the Australian heartland. Fasher’s is a tale of animal brutality that strikes to the core of the Australian experience even a century after. Similarly, there is something all too familiar about the pillboxes that scatter the battlefields of Ross Laurie’s paintings *Battlefield*, *Passchendaele I* and *Passchendaele II*. They are hard modernist intrusions into deeply scarred landscapes that seem to look out at us with the familiar gaze of the symbol of another cultural myth: the helmet of Nolan’s Ned Kelly. These gestures remind us of the ever-present closeness of violence to home.

Ultimately, war art seeks to make meaning from the unthinkable, to somehow find spiritual succour somewhere in the mess. It can be found here too, in Michelle Hiscock’s ethereally still *The Menin Gate*, that famous subject of Will Longstaff’s ghostly picture. In Hiscock’s work, the living ghost is time itself. It hangs there, suspended from consequence, a protected moment. We find it too in the shapes and motifs in Idris Murphy’s paintings, which seem to be always on the cusp of resolving into a cross, a star, something else. It is present in Amanda Penrose Hart’s *Australian first division memorial, Pozières*, a bleak, tragi-comic landscape as only an Australian sensibility can produce.

The tragedy of war art is that it will continue to be made. Painters follow war’s aftermath as carts do horses. As such, they will always be too late to prevent it. But their work helps us to seek answers for why humanity will always fight, and paint, and fight.



Left: Harrie Fasher and Paul Ferman
Above: Wreath placed by Euan Macleod for R. McLeod



Caterpillar Crater, Hill 60



Michelle Hiscock drawing, Hamel



Australian bunker, Hill 60



Unexploded ordnance, Bullecourt



The Australian War Memorial, Le Hamel



Deirdre Bean, Polygon Wood



Amanda Penrose Hart painting, Messines



Pear Trench, Hamel



Artists walking the fields of Corbie

The artists would like to thank

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Randi Linnegar – Director, King Street Gallery on William

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Richard Perram OAM – Director, Bathurst Regional Art Gallery

Vivien Clyne – Director, Bank Art Museum Moree

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