

# ARTIST PROFILE

The Artists Behind The Art

NEWS | FEATURES | EXHIBITIONS | REVIEWS | PROJECTS | ESSAYS | ABOUT US | OPPORTUNITIES | SUBSCRIBE | DISCOVERY

SEARCH...

✉ Sign up for the Artist Profile eNewsletter

Enter your email address

Home / Luke Sciberras | Out There

## Luke Sciberras | Out There

By Luke Sciberras | March 27, 2017

Like 40

Google +

As a nod of thanks to his hosts and friends, and a celebration of his fruitful travels with them, Luke Sciberras presents his latest exhibition 'Out There' - a rich exhibition of works from his travels in the Outback.

One of these unique trips that inspired works in the exhibition was recounted by Sciberras in Issue 37 of Artist Profile. In particular Sciberras reflects on this rare time spent learning from Aboriginal artists' Lenie Namatjira and Gloria Pannka from the Ittja Ntjarra / Many Hands Art Centre on the edge of Alice Springs...



Scrub Bull NT, 2016, oil on board, 120 x 160cm



Reflecting back on some road trips and dreaming them up in the subsequent months can be like reliving a favourite film or book – standout lines, cinematic sequences and characters who enchant and inspire – and some gouge into the flesh and not only pepper your mind with brilliant images but give you a kind of painterly lift-off.

My arrival at the Ittja Ntjarra / Many Hands Art Centre on the edge of Alice Springs and approaching the long painting tables I had all the trepidation of a young intern fronting up to a corporate boardroom. Surreptitious summings-up, lowered eyes and gingerly made introductions quickly became whinnies of laughter and excitedly made plans to head out later that week to paint the hills surrounding Standley Chasm.

The preceding weeks has been spent emailing and phoning the art centre director Iris Bendor to wrest a date, me almost begging to be given the chance to learn from Lenie Namatjira and Gloria Pannka something of the watercolour style of landscape painting they inherited from their grandfather Albert.

As Stella (my daughter) and I loaded up, we were warned that if the ladies didn't take a shine to us that they'd turn the horse around at the end of the day and our dreams and preparations for camping would be dashed. As our confidence grew we drove west while the huge kangaroo tails defrosted in the back of the troop carrier and we eventually found a makeshift studio on the sheltered saddle of a hill and began warming to conversations with a tone and pace all their own.

After a while eruptions of chatter would drown out the swish and scratch of half a dozen or so artists rendering carefully the shards of red rock that rise out of the long yellow grasses and spinifex that are dusted over the west



MacDonnell Ranges. Scraps of advice, patient demonstrations and a lot of learning by example (me copying) helped ease an immensely steep learning curve, and as the first afternoon matured the customary heated discussion ensued into what Stella and my skin names were to be.

Once that was settled there were long lessons on the construction of the system. I was Gloria's dad, Lenie's uncle and to great shrieks and gales of ridicule, husband (hubby) to Ivy Pareroutja. Here I think in our warmth combined with a great deal of passionate talk about painting, our friendships were found.

Suddenly discussions became more lively about the application of watercolour, often from conflicting angles among the women. Lenie or Gloria would take over my brush and suddenly I saw generations of elegant fingers and sophisticated understanding apply their magic over my boisterous beginnings.

It struck me that Stella and I were receiving knowledge that was moving in a figure eight form, from a non-Indigenous tradition, through Indigenous eyes and back again in turn to us, a view of their land through "white-man-style" eyes ...

The story of Rex Battarbee's first travels into Aranda country is now famous, having honed his watercolour technique while recovering from near-fatal injuries sustained in the battlefield of Bullecourt in France during the First World War. Having been left for dead and miraculously rescued, his recovery would take some four years in hospitals in both Europe and Victoria. In a tremendous example of triumph over adversity he subsequently went on to make beautiful works of the landscape and held an exhibition in 1937 at the mission of Hermannsburg where many of the Indigenous locals would find not only inspiration but an enduring friendship with Battarbee. Among them were the young Albert Namatjira, Otto Pareroutja and others.

With all the history and technique of the Namatjiras' hallowed legacy came another dimension to the scene – Dreamtime stories layered in turn over the white-man missionary history which informed the whole tapestry. These women who have lived long, hard lives on grand cattle stations, town camps and on long mustering journeys, carried with them a firm belief in the Christian God who governed their childhoods – and all at once the view of the landscape is entirely traced with creatures and events of the Dreamtime. At times the features of the landscape we were painting and driving through were described to us as a giant caterpillar, or as a great looming face, times when mythical creatures scraped the land into the form it takes now ... and at other times out painting when asked "why do you do it like that Gloria?" The answer eventually comes ... "because it looks good!"

As we drove at dusk through the crude wire gates into Aboriginal lands to find a place to camp we realised that this was a welcome to country, creeks and hills, stone tools and rocky tracks which were all familiar to these women who have spent the most of their lives not only as artists but as the wives of jackaroos working for the man, and now this vast land is theirs again. With all this comes the overwhelming sense of privilege and welcome, traversing these long valleys with the people who know them best.

With an old grinding stone I found, Gloria set to pounding up the night's supply of pituri (a chewing tobacco type plant) for herself and Lenie; kangaroo tails and sweet potatoes were foiled up and buried in coals, and the only thing left to do was to talk as the fire grew warmer and the night drew around us. Lenie patted and smoothed all the ground around herself while she proudly told us of how she first flew to Perth (pointing west) then Dubai, and to London to meet the Queen (opening an exhibition of Albert Namatjira paintings) remarking on what lovely white teeth she had for an old lady. Often the tone would swing to a sinister tease about the "scrub bull" that was just there beyond the light of the fire, just near that big rock! Surely it was for Stella's benefit but on turning in, it had me staring out of my swag a little more intently than usual.

At the first blush of pink at dawn we realised that Lenie and Gloria had been up for hours, stoking, tidying and talking, and by the time a third billy of tea was poured, Gloria began speaking very directly in great gusts about the fate of their grandfather's intellectual property and copyright. She told us at length about how he always lived in poverty on the edge of town among the rocky hills near where Lenie lives now, and in the decades after his death none of his family has received the royalties from the plethora of merchandise, resales and reproductions of his work. Efforts are under way, she assures us, to return the ownership of his copyright to the family so that, as she put it, "we can continue his legacy with the funds it requires".

Whether or not a retrospective restoration of funds or dues will or can ever be granted to these people, there is a richness, an uprightness and a living tradition that is entirely theirs. The fact that they happily share it with the likes of me is testament to the integrity and virtue they carry, a repairing and spacious approach to art that is infectious.

It gives me great heart that an artist can see the world through new eyes, every time one really looks.

Here, essentially is a story and a history that is living on, but like most it is not linear, not black or white. It is helixed. From either end of a highway there is another Australia, one to go into rather than out to.

@luke\_sciberras  
manyhandsart.com.au

**EXHIBITION**  
**Out There**  
**King Street Gallery on William, Sydney**  
**28 March – 22 April**

Courtesy the artist and King Street Gallery on William.



**Artist Profile**  
6,230 likes



5 friends like this




**Artist Profile**  
April 20 at 4:28pm


'Measure' spans Debra Dawes' work from the last three decades - the engagement in political and art through her abstracted form of expression.




Start the discussion...

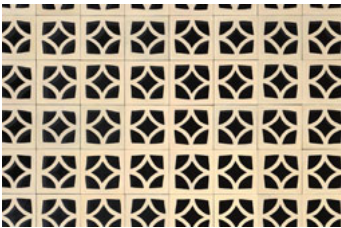
Be the first to comment.

 Subscribe

 Add Disqus to your siteAdd DisqusAdd

 Privacy

Latest / Most Viewed / Most Commented / Most Shared / Related



**Debra Dawes**  
By Kon Gouriotis | April 20, 2017  
Debra Dawes' paintings have a visceral effect on the viewer. Her work appears cerebral but derives from experience and emotion.

1 week ago

Like 9



**Drawn to Print | David Fairbairn**  
By Artist Profile | April 19, 2017  
Pushing his work to new scale and heights, David Fairbairn presents a new body of large scale etchings - works that are drawn to the...

2 weeks ago

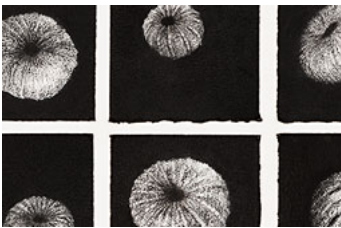
Like 31



**Chase Archer**  
By Chase Archer | April 12, 2017  
It is a wildly decadent and egotistical thing to do, expecting people to connect with these things that you've created. It's a very personal process.

3 weeks ago

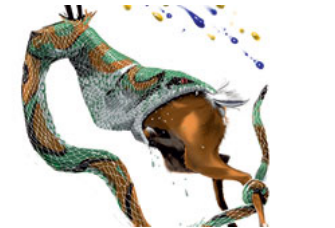
Like 53



**Drawn to a cabinet of curiosities**  
By Artist Profile | April 6, 2017  
An air of mystery and excitement follows Jennifer Keeler-Milne's latest exhibition of drawn curiosities.

3 weeks ago

Like 98



**Like an antelope through a python...**  
By Idris Murphy | April 3, 2017  
Is art education in Australia focusing on producing an epidemic of mediocre PhD theses that nobody reads, at the expense of vibrant artists well prepared...

4 weeks ago

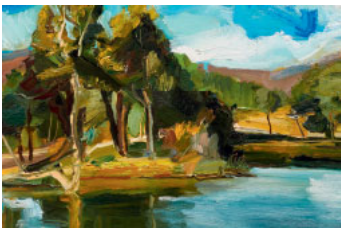
Like 82



**Grealy Takes the Win**  
By Artist Profile | March 31, 2017  
Congratulations Gary Grealy - named Winner of National Photographic Portrait Prize 2017

1 month ago

Like 12



**Robert Malherbe**  
By Judith Pugh | March 31, 2017  
Robert's objects are still, but somehow immediate. They're still, but they are alive.

1 month ago

Like 23



**Nicole Ellis**  
By Anna Johnson | March 30, 2017  
What makes a painting a painting is not always paint. The technical is not the actual.

1 month ago

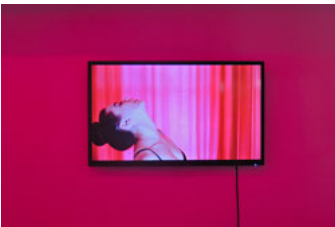
Like 2



**Tom Arthur**  
By Lucy Stranger | March 30, 2017  
Tom Arthur is an artist completely at play. From making "things" as a small boy he has successfully turned it into a lifelong passion.

1 month ago

Like 1



## Redlands Konica Minolta Art Prize 2017

By Artist Profile | March 29, 2017

Congratulations to the winners of the 2017 Redlands Konica Minolta Art Prize!

1 month ago

Like 12



### Uneasy Idyll

By Artist Profile | March 22, 2017

Playing with form and figure, Uneasy Idyll presents four artists who explore the ambiguous and sometimes uncanny relationship between aspects of the land and the...

1 month ago

Like 90



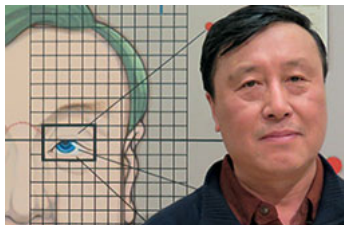
### The Extractive Frontier : Mining for Art

By Lucy Stranger | March 7, 2017

Using mining as metaphor, artists explore the good and the bad in the act of mineral exploration and exploitation.

2 months ago

Like 1



### Guan Wei

By Michael Young | March 2, 2017

Chinese-Australian artist Guan Wei stood deferentially in front of his self-portrait 'Plastic Surgery' (2015)...

2 months ago

Like 17

## Happy When It Rains

By Artist Profile | March 24, 2017

Light and dark, food and wine, art and death - this exhibition represents all things insatiably decadent.

1 month ago

Like 7



### The bluethumb Art Prize

By Artist Profile | March 15, 2017

Shifting landscapes in the art market as the success of the online bluethumb Art Prize opens up new avenues of opportunity for emerging artists.

2 months ago

Like 44



### Issue 38 – see what's inside!

By Artist Profile | March 7, 2017

John Firth-Smith graces the cover from his Hill End studio, and is accompanied by in-depth features with Zoe Young, Joe Frost, Fiona McMonagle, Michael Buzacott,...

2 months ago

Like 5



### The White Room

By Lucy Stranger | February 28, 2017

With an exhibition name inspired by an album by KLF, Stanley Street's latest group exhibition curated by Sean Morris sets you up to expect the...

2 months ago

Like 4

## I Am, You Are, We Are, They Are

By Artist Profile | March 23, 2017

Four Sydney artists bring to light the multicultural image of Australia - exposing the issues and questions that surround its identity.

1 month ago

Like 26



### Dan Kyle | From the Turon to the Colo

By Owen Craven | March 7, 2017

Dan Kyle's paintings are translations of what he sees – the beauty, the unique forms, the colours – articulating the bush in his own light....

2 months ago

Like 22



### Bill Brown

By Laura Fisher | March 2, 2017

For Bill Brown, the act of making a painting is at heart a process of discovery, oriented by one point of departure after another.

2 months ago

Like 3



### Ian Strange | Shadows

By Lucy Stranger | February 27, 2017

Australian born, New York-based artist Ian Strange returns to Sydney to broach a familiar subject in a not so familiar way.

2 months ago

Like 6