

The Sydney Morning Herald

CULTURE ART & DESIGN GOOD WEEKEND

It's difficult not to view John Bartley's works in relation to the bushfires

By [John McDonald](#)

February 28, 2020 – 8.46pm



John Bartley. Lives: Scotts Head, NSW. **Age:** 63. **Represented by:** King Street Gallery on William, Sydney; no Melbourne gallery.



John Bartley, *Visitation* (2020), acrylic on canvas, 125cm x 175cm, \$10,550.

His thing. Highly expressive abstract paintings made from shifting veils of colour.

Our take. John Bartley was a late starter, beginning at the National Art School (aka East Sydney Tech) at the age of 30. He has become one of the most dedicated and consistent Australian abstract painters of his generation, with a distinctive style that has been pursued and refined from one exhibition to the next. Although Bartley's paintings are essentially abstract, it's possible to see many things in them. In *Lost Souls* and *Dark Beautiful* (the picture that lends its name to his

current exhibition) his canvases are saturated in red, overlaid with swathes of sooty black.

It's hard not to view these works in relation to the recent bushfires, with all the drama and tragedy they entailed. If most of these paintings have echoes of landscape it is a special kind of landscape: the turbulent vistas we associate with "the sublime", best exemplified by the work of J. M. W. Turner. Whether we are looking at flood or fire, high mountains, deep crevices or stormy seas, we are always conscious of the drama and implicit danger in each scene.

Not all these works are so gloomy or operatic, but there is almost always a dark undercurrent. These are not paintings that demand an intensive analysis – by nature they are emotional and intuitive, and this is exactly the way Bartley would like his audience to respond.

Can I afford it? There are 21 paintings in this show, mostly acrylic on canvas or wood panel. The least expensive is *Little Landscape* (30cm x 30cm), at \$1500. The highest priced is *Visitation* (pictured, 125cm x 175cm) at \$10,500. This is still significantly less than Bartley's record price of \$12,000.

Where can I have a squiz? King Street Gallery on William, 177-185 William Street, Darlinghurst, Sydney, until March 14; kingstreetgallery.com.au.

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