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## Guy Warren

February 2, 2018

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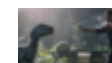


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**@JMDartcritic**



Very sad to learn we've lost Deb  
Cameron. One of the rare



Guy Warren, 'Nullabor with figure' (2010)

Guy Warren is part of the landscape of Australian art, which may be the reason he has been so often overlooked. An exact contemporary of artists such as Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd and Jeffrey Smart, Warren has lived happily enough with a much lower profile. This is partly a reflection of his personality, which displays a good humour and modesty quite at odds with the competitive nature of the Australian art scene.

To attain such Zen-like equanimity one suspects Warren has never allowed his art to completely dominate his life. He has worked as hard as anyone in the studio but without the fearsome anxieties Van Gogh bequeathed to the modern artist. Despite the fact that today's most successful

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That was exactly the main point. Without a strong exhibition program a gallery is doomed to failure  
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This is an opinion piece for the Art Newspaper, but it has a certain relevance to Sydney...  
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contemporary artists resemble company directors and advertising executives, we still like to believe all great painters are within a hairs-breadth of reaching for the razor and hacking away at an ear.

This is where Warren parts company with popular mythology. He hasn't stood around waiting for inspiration to strike, but pushed on industriously, creating paintings, works on paper and a range of more experimental work. Although he has never abandoned the process of drawing from observation, Warren also shuffles through his memories, dredging up images from different periods of his life, most notably the months he spent in the rainforest of Bougainville during the Second World War, and his continuing visits to Jamberoo on the South Coast of New South Wales.



Guy Warren, 'Two Men in a Boat (Shoalhaven series)' (2004)

The watercolour, Two Men in a Boat (Shoalhaven series), is presented as an Australian landscape, but the silhouetted figures with their schematic oars and canoe, seem to have been taken from a tribal carving, or perhaps the wall of a cave.

In a work such as Mountains Warren presents a relatively faithful rendition of the landscape, but with most pictures in this show he allows his imagination to go roaming in the desert or the forest. The figure in Nullabor with figure, is no more than a ghost. It feels like a revision of Drysdale's iconic Drover's Wife, but the woman who stands like a monument in that earlier painting is now a spectre. Warren's blue Nullabor is a melancholy place in which traces of human activity are absorbed into a lonely vista of scrub and sky.

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Guy Warren, 'Mountains' (2017)

The fact that Warren imagines the Nullabor in shades of blue shows how unwilling he is to submit to the abiding stereotypes of Australian art, with the red, unforgiving expanses of the Outback being top of the list.

Warren's watercolour technique can be epigrammatic, laying down lines and shapes as quick notations on a blank page. In a work such as *Emu Nest, Tibooburra*, the distinctive marks made by a brush are partnered with a series of blurry splotches. The shapes denote a liberal use of water, but their pictorial role is to suggest a searing heat in which trees and bushes lose their outlines and their solidity.



Guy Warren, 'Emu Nest, Tibooburra' (2016)

*Moments of Refection 1*, is virtually a diagram of the landscape, with a mountain reduced to a single, meandering line of paint, while plants are daubed in like Chinese characters. All the

elements of a conventional view are present but Warren would like us to consider them one by one. He is not merely painting the physical components of a scene, he is evoking the space in the landscape and the way it insinuates itself into the viewer's consciousness. In typical fashion he is reaching beyond preconceptions and beyond appearances, in search of the metaphysical.

Guy Warren

King Street Gallery on William Street

30 January – 24 February, 2018

**Tags:** Australian art, painting, works on paper

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