



TOM CARMENT

Two years in South Australia



ABOVE Corny Point
Lighthouse II 2021
oil on marine ply
16 x 21cm

COVER Wading out to the
Boat, The Pines 2021
oil on marine ply
16 x 21cm

These paintings were done on Kurna,
Narungga, Ngarrindjeri, Nukunu,
Ngadjuri and Nganguruku Country.

22 March – 16 April 2022

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King Street Gallery
on William

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Tom painting, on the cliffs above Maslin Beach, SA
Photo: Gemma Brook

This exhibition was painted in South Australia, over a two-year span, starting at the time of the bushfires, going through the various phases of the Covid-19 pandemic and ending with the last Sydney and Melbourne lockdowns.

The change wrought by the first Covid-19 outbreak in Adelaide, in March 2020, was very sudden. In the weeks leading up to it, the city had been crammed with visitors, from interstate and overseas, attending all the arts festivals. In the nick of time, as news of the pandemic started to dominate the media, Writers' Week, Womad and Fringe were completed; workers in high vis started bumping out all the stalls, stages and seating from the city parks, and the groundkeepers started watering the bare eroded turf. Then the city went very quiet. With our next door neighbour, Tanya, we decided to buy chooks, two ridiculous-looking black bantams which arrived in a cardboard box. I built a stylish coop for them, with the help and advice of the whole of Murrays Lane it seemed,

using scavenged timber and some marine ply that I'd been hoarding for my paintings. The chooks started laying straight away, two small pinkish eggs a day. I painted a still life of the first four of them.

My partner Jan worked from home for most of the next year and a half, in the lounge room of the one-bedroom cottage we rented. I stored my paints in a cupboard outside the kitchen door, under a narrow verandah, where I also painted my still lifes. Often I kept my panels and paints in the car, as I went off most days to paint outside, subjects within an hour or two of Adelaide. I kept my focus local and became sequentially obsessed with certain motifs: rocks at Mannum Falls, Easter Lilies at Mount Lofty, a crumbling headland at Blanche Point, a row of Sugar Gums in the Adelaide Parklands, Jacarandas on Morphett Street, summer paddocks on Bull Creek Road, pale yellow wheatfields near Laura, old graves in West Terrace Cemetery, cheap local fish, and fruit grown by friends. Sometimes I went further away within the state, with Jan and friends and often alone, camping for a few days or a week, in my small hiking tent: at Laura, Melrose, and most especially Corny Point where I camped six times. I fell in love with the south-westerly tip of Yorke Peninsula, Narungga Country, where the yellow wheat and barley fields meet the rugged limestone and basalt coastline.

Returning home from each trip I'd place the new pictures on a long set of double shelves which I'd built, running from the kitchen all the way down the narrow hall (I didn't want to bang nails into the walls of our rented cottage). Eating my breakfast or chopping vegetables on the kitchen bench I would glance at them and assess their worth. Later, they were stored in boxes beside the bed, to make room for new ones. I'd take the bad ones out into the backyard to be sanded off. When the paintings re-emerged to be sorted and taken to the photographer, there were more than two hundred. As I placed them on the easel in front of Sam's camera, one by one, and explained to him where each was done, it felt like a sped-up slideshow of my life, two years of it.

I write this on the eve of my departure from Adelaide, an exit delayed by four months when the third wave of Covid-19 came to Sydney. The boxes of oil paintings are tightly packed into the back of the car, ready for a dawn departure through Mount Lofty Ranges and then the Mallee country, crossing the border at Pinnaroo.

Jan rang me from Sydney a week ago and said that both my suits have been eaten by moths, full of holes - she'd had to throw them out.

Tom Carment, 2021





Afternoon Fenceline near Adelaide Airport 2020 watercolour on paper 19.5 x 29cm



Yellow Brick Wall, Blenheim St 2020 watercolour on paper 11.5 x 16cm



Birds on the Wire, Gouger Street 2020 watercolour on paper 11.5 x 16cm



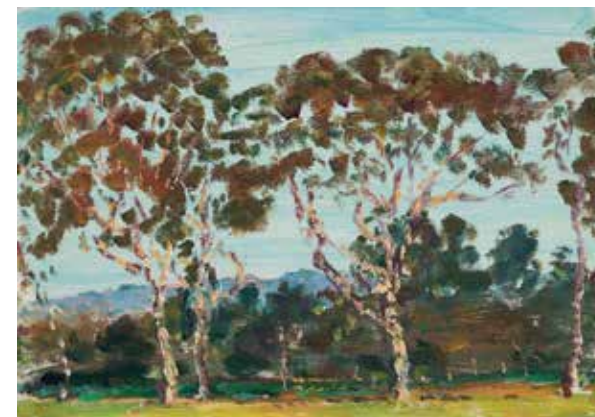
Wright Street

I used to walk from our house in Murrays Lane to a public phone booth in Wright Street to make my phone calls. It was a quiet location, with little through traffic, under some trees, with a laundromat over the road and a homeless services office on the corner.

One afternoon I was just beginning to dial a number when I noticed something nearby which made me hang up. A muscular shirtless man with a bleeding lump on his forehead was leaning towards the closed window of a parked car, yelling at a thin, neatly-dressed man, who sat behind the steering wheel holding a sandwich. I picked up my coins and address book and walked over.

'Is everything OK here?' I asked. The bleeding man wheeled around:

'Who do you think you are mate? My fucking counsellor?'



TOP Two Sugar Gums,
Adelaide Parklands 2021
oil on marine ply
21 x 30cm

MIDDLE Avenue of Sugar
Gums, Adelaide
Parklands II 2020
oil on marine ply
21 x 30cm

BOTTOM Avenue of Sugar
Gums, Adelaide
Parklands I 2020
oil on marine ply
21 x 30cm

LEFT Phone Booth on
Wright Street - Where
I Make my Calls 2020
oil on linen
45 x 56cm



Windy Afternoon, Henley 2021 oil on marine ply 16 x 21cm



Tidal Pools, Henley I 2021 oil on marine ply 16 x 21cm



RIGHT *Nocturne, through
our Bedroom Window,
Murrays Lane 2020*
watercolour on paper
16 x 11.5cm



LEFT *Grave and Weed, West
Terrace Cemetery 2020*
watercolour on paper
31 x 23cm

West Terrace Cemetery

Adelaide's large cemetery was a quiet refuge during the time of lockdown, and lay across a six-lane road, not far from our cottage. In the north-east sector I was attracted to a tall milk thistle, growing in front of the 1892 grave of a man named John Taylor. I drew and painted it over several days. When I returned for a final session the weed had been roughly hacked down, as though by a boy with a stick rather than a gardener. It lay in a heap on the ground. My picture remained a fragment and perhaps it looked better like that.

I moved on to a section of the cemetery where a remnant Quandong grove tilts the old graves sideways and casts speckled shadow along the ground. As I sat painting, with my back to a headstone, I heard a racket of myna bird noise approaching fast. Something soft brushed along my left arm. It was the fur of a big red fox. It had jumped through a narrow gap between the graves, without seeing me. I watched its loping passage across the gravestones, followed by angry birds.



Jacaranda Shadow, Morphett Street 2020 watercolour on paper 11.5 x 16cm



Jacarandas, Morphett Street I 2019 watercolour on paper 11.5 x 16cm



Edge of the Dune, West Beach 2021 watercolour on paper 11.5 x 16cm



Treetops, Mount Lofty VI 2020 oil on marine ply 21 x 30cm

Mount Lofty

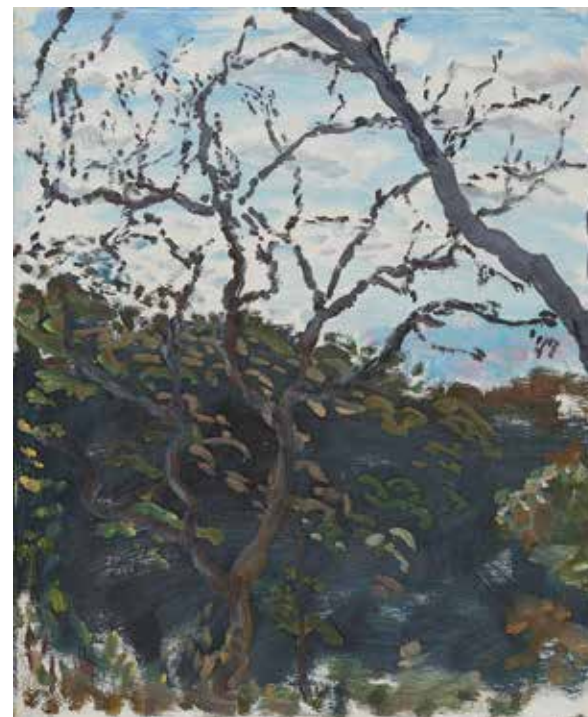
In late summer 2020, while my friends Sassy and Karl were stuck in Sydney, I went up to their garden at Mount Lofty every couple of days to water a dozen young fruit trees they'd planted in November. There's no mains water there and the flow from a vine-covered concrete rainwater tank near the house is slow. I found various old lengths of garden hose in the shed and joined them together until they reached the furthest peach sapling at the bottom of the sloping orchard. I gave each tree half an hour of trickle while I got on with some painting, or while I wrote in my journal under an old pine tree nearby. When I became too involved in my painting, certain trees got more than their share of trickled tank water. The rest of the large garden made me think of 'The Lost Domain' by Alain-Fournier, one of my favourite novels. It was once a neat and European space, with winding stone paths and beds of flowers, planted and tended by Karl's German and Latvian parents, but since their deaths it had become wild and overgrown. Fragments of its past still poked through. By April I felt the young fruit trees had survived the worst of the summer heat with only one fatality, the quince. From the parched soil, pink Easter Lilies started emerging, as though by some miracle, their colour so luminescent among shadowy pines, bleached grass and autumn leaves.



Easter Lily Series (Mount Lofty) 2020 oil on marine ply 24 x 19cm (each)



Kitchen Window, Mount Lofty 2019 oil on linen 56 x 46cm



Against the Light, Morialta 2020 oil on linen 30 x 25cm



Plane Tree, Mount Lofty,
Winter Morning 2020
oil on marine ply 30.5 x 38cm



Forked Tree, Cleland 2020
oil on marine ply 21.5 x 17cm



The View out from Cleland 2020
oil on marine ply 24 x 19cm



Treetops, Mount Lofty VIII 2020 oil on marine ply 21 x 30cm



Corny Point, Yorke Peninsula

In the small museum at Corny Point I found a transcript of excerpts from the Lighthouse Keepers' Journal. Behind the lighthouse, on the headland, there used to be two stone cottages, one for the Head Keeper and another for the 2nd Keeper. Alfred Webling, a retired sea captain with a long white beard, was Head Keeper from 1888-1906. He outlasted a number of 2nd Keepers: one was sacked for making overtures to Webling's daughters, asking them to meet him at 'unseemly hours' and reading their mail; another 2nd Keeper drowned while bathing in the sea, his body found four days later, five miles south of the lighthouse. In 1888, a journal entry recorded that, at 3.03 am, 'a most brilliant meteor' was observed. It lit up the whole district for ten seconds before disappearing into the sea.

This is the country of the Narungga people. In 1802, Matthew Flinders anchored The Investigator just off these shores, and noticed fires at night, heard howling dogs; campfires of the Narungga people on a beach north of Corny Point. Perhaps they too looked across the water and saw Flinder's vessel, disappearing and reappearing on the swell, and then, after dawn, the white sails unfurling. By the end of the 19th century most of the Mallee trees on the peninsula had been cleared. Wheat, barley and sheep paddocks stretched from coast to coast over country where the Narungga hunted.

The Corny Point Lighthouse guided ketches and steamers, filled with sacks of grain, around the rocky southern coast.



TOP Tractor at Low Tide, Corny Point 2020 watercolour on paper 11.5 x 16cm
 BOTTOM Wet Sand, Berry Bay 2020 watercolour on paper 11.5 x 16cm
 LEFT Corny Point Lighthouse, Windy Morning 2021 oil on linen 25 x 30cm



Berry Bay, Looking East 2021 watercolour on paper 11.5 x 16cm



Returning Surfer, Berry Bay 2021 oil on linen 25 x 30cm



Water's Edge, Gravel Bay I 2021
oil on linen 23 x 30cm



Corny Point Lighthouse Series 2021 oil on marine ply 16 x 21cm (each)



Balsalt Extrusion, Lighthouse Beach II 2021 oil on marine ply 13 x 30cm



Wading out to the Boat, The Pines 2021 oil on marine ply 16 x 21cm



Afternoon Salt Marsh, The Pines 2021 oil on marine ply 16 x 21cm



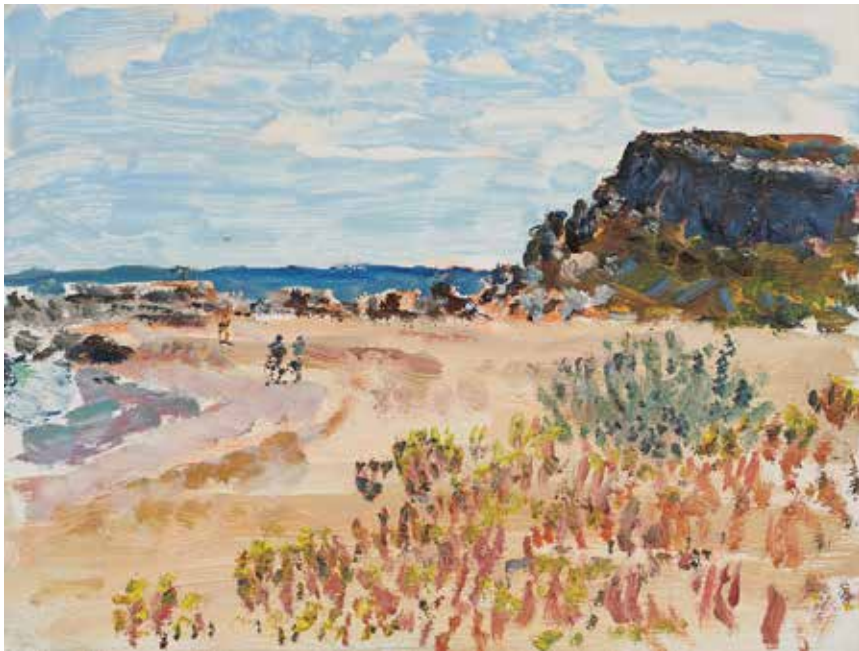
Edge of the Paddock, Corny Point I 2021 oil on marine ply 16 x 21cm



Wind-bent Tree, The Pines 2021 oil on marine ply 13 x 30cm



Windy Paddock, near The Pines 2021 oil on marine ply 13 x 30cm



Shell Beach, Yorke Peninsula 2021 oil on marine ply 16 x 21cm



Windblown Eucalypt, Inneston 2021 oil on marine ply 13 x 20cm

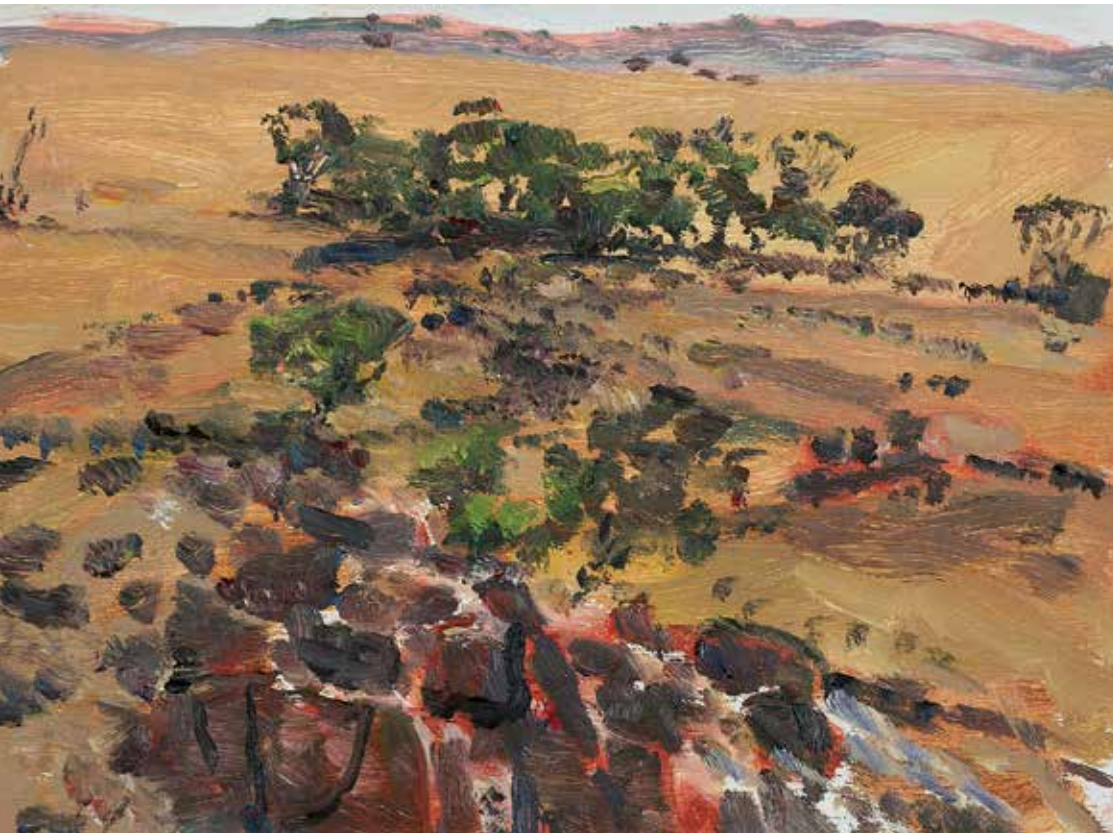
Inneston

Underneath the salt lakes around Inneston there were great slabs of gypsum. During the 1920s and 1930s a few hundred people lived here and mined it, loading it manually onto a horse-drawn narrow gauge railway which led to Stenhouse Bay. They used this off-white gypsum for making plaster and also school chalk, Bellco brand. I'm old enough to remember it, packed tightly in grey cardboard boxes. The teacher in the tiny Inneston school was given samples to try out for quality. Now it's a National Park, full of emus, and the Mallee trees are reclaiming the once bare ground around the old mining town, their roots, like ships' ropes, criss-crossing the dirt roads.

Mannum

Just north of Mannum Falls, 'No Trespassing' is written on one of the rocks, quite faded now, done with a house-painting brush. I guess it was meant to stop people straying into the nearby sheep paddocks. You'd think the dramatic gorge below would be more attractive to sightseers than these slopes of tussocky grass and bitten-down bushes. At the end of summer Mannum Falls is dry, with pads of scum floating on its remnant pools, waiting for the winter rains to flush them out. A good location for a Spaghetti Western ... the Mannum Badlands.

In July, after weeks of steady rain, I returned to the Falls and they were living up to their name. Reedy Creek runs through a lot of agricultural land, the water between the swirls of white foam was the yellow of a manilla envelope. Trekking back downstream at 4.30 pm, I noticed the upper car park was full of trucks and cars. A crowd of locals had driven there after work and walked down the track to look at the wild water: tradies in high vis, nurses and shopworkers still in uniform and schoolkids leaning out from their restraining parents at the edge of the slippery rocks.



LEFT Looking West from Mannum Falls 2021 oil on marine ply 16 x 21cm
RIGHT No Trespassing Rock, Mannum 2021 oil on linen 25 x 30cm



Gums in a Creek Bed, Echunga I 2020 oil on linen 25 x 30cm



Afternoon Ridge and Clouds, Portee 2020 oil on wood panel 14 x 33cm



Paddock Track, Mannum 2021 oil on marine ply 18.5 x 32cm



Blanche Point I 2021 oil on marine ply 16 x 21cm



Blanche Point IV 2021 oil on marine ply 16 x 21cm



Stringybark Forest, Deep Creek 2021 oil on marine ply 16 x 21cm

Blanche Point

On Mother's Day, 9 May, Jan and I walked north along the beach at Rapid Bay towards a steep headland. There was rain out to sea, but where we walked was in bright and intermittent sunshine. I went ahead a bit and entered a small open cave beneath the headland. In the blackened surrounds of a stone fireplace I found a rock with HAPPY MOTHERS DAY written crookedly on it in Texta. I took it out to show Jan and she thought I'd done it. 'I wouldn't have the foresight to do a thing like that,' I protested. 'You can search me for a pen.'

'But it's your handwriting.' I put the rock back where I found it.

A few weeks later, north of Port Noarlunga, I picked up another, larger rock which looked like a miniature Henry Moore sculpture and took it home, thinking I might draw it. Later I felt uneasy about its removal, so I drove back down there, and dropped the rock on the sand, close to where I'd picked it up. Nearby, I set up my little stool and laid out my oil paints among the coarse dune grasses, above where the sand was lifting in the wind. I commenced a series of pictures, views of the crumbling headland, Blanche Point. For several weeks I returned there, day after day, to record it in all the varied lights and weathers of winter.



Gully to the Sea, Maslins I 2020 oil on wood panel 13 x 20cm



Dawn Clouds, The Coorong 2020 oil on wood panel 15 x 20cm



Leaving the Surf, Middleton 2020 oil on marine ply 19 x 24cm



TOP Afternoon Paddocks near Laura 2021 oil on marine ply 13 x 30cm

BOTTOM Dam near Echunga, Afternoon Light 2019 oil on wood panel 17 x 32cm

RIGHT Gums and Wheat Paddock, Cattle Track Road 2021 oil on linen 23 x 30cm



Cattle Track Road

In 1865, the Surveyor-General of South Australia, George Goyder, rode up and down the state and mapped a line north of which the cultivation of crops was deemed extremely inadvisable. To this day the Goyder Line, which snakes across the state from east to west is a good guide for farmers and pastoralists. I camped a bit south of Goyder's Line, at Laura Community Caravan Park where a rooster woke me each morning at 2.40 am. I went out each day, exploring back roads in the bone yellow cropping country. I found a copse of gums I liked, just north of Redhill, on Cattle Track Road, at the edge of some wheatfields. Half an hour after I'd set up and started to paint, a twin cab ute screeched its brakes and pulled over, blocking my view. The driver leaned out the window and asked, 'Why aren't you painting the Flinders?'

'I like this spot,' I replied. 'I'll get to the Flinders eventually.' He shook his head and accelerated fast back onto the bitumen, raising a cloud of dust which settled slowly into my wet paint.



Summer Paddocks, Ashbourne 2021 oil on linen 25 x 30cm



Paddock Gate, Ashbourne 2021 oil on marine ply 16 x 21cm



Treeline, Bull Creek Road I 2020 oil on marine ply 21 x 30cm



TOP Asparagus 2020 oil on marine ply 14.5 x 30cm

BOTTOM The First Four Bantam Eggs 2020 oil on wood panel 15 x 33cm

RIGHT Yellowtail Mackerel on Robert's Plate 2020 oil on linen 30.5 x 38cm

Mackerel

On a November afternoon I painted some Yellowtail Mackerel (\$5 a kilo at Capps Seafood). I paint my still lifes outside, next to the backdoor, under a few square metres of plexiglass roofing. The light is good there, but on a hot day the flies soon come around to investigate. This time I noticed that the flies were really big and that, no, they weren't flies, but bees – our bees, from the hive in our back lane community garden. About ten of them were sucking at the fish blood. Soursob Bob, a musician and beekeeper, had recently smoked and robbed our hive, extracting 20 litres of honey – we had four jars of it on our kitchen table. What else, I wondered, did our urban bees drink (apart from fish blood)? Spillages on the pavement outside La Sing Karaoke Club around the corner ... trickle from the garbage truck? I hope there were a few flowers in the mix.





The Last of our Homegrown Tomatoes 2021 oil on linen 23 x 30cm



TOP ROW *Annaliese Tinned Chick Peas* 2020 oil on linen 19 x 24cm

Trevally on Zambian Cloth 2020 oil on linen 30.5 x 38cm

MIDDLE ROW *Sugar Bananas, Coconut Milk and Red Watering Can* 2020 oil on linen 25 x 30cm

Sugar Bananas 2020 oil on linen 25 x 30cm

BOTTOM ROW *Late Tomatoes, Murrays Lane* 2020 oil on linen 19 x 24cm

Green Tomatoes, Murrays Lane 2020 oil on linen 19 x 24cm



Moonrise, Koroop 2020 oil on linen 45 x 55cm

Tom Carment was born in Sydney in 1954 and has been painting landscapes, portraits and still lifes since the early 1970s. His work has been shown in numerous exhibitions and at King Street Gallery since 1992. He has been selected twelve times for the Archibald Prize. He is also a writer and his latest book 'Womerah Lane: Lives and Landscapes' was shortlisted for the non-fiction section of the 2021 NSW Premier's Literary Awards.

For Tom's full CV go to kingstreetgallery.com.au/artists/tom-carment

This catalogue is a selection of paintings from the exhibition 'Two Years in South Australia' at King Street Gallery on William, 2022.



Viv's Mandarins on a Portugese Plate 2021
oil on linen 19 x 24cm

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on William **GLW**

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