

John Bartley

Something but Nothing

17 May – 11 June

2022





10am – 6pm Tuesday – Saturday 177-185 William St Darlinghurst NSW 2010 Australia T: 61 2 9360 9727 E: art@kingstreetgallery.com www.kingstreetgallery.com.au

Above: *Undre*ss 2021 acrylic on canvas 40 x 40 cm Front cover: *Arthur* 2020 acrylic on board 120 x 120 cm Artwork photography: Roller Photography





Falling 2022 acrylic on board 59 x 119 cm

I was right on the verge of saying that John Bartley's paintings "capture transience" when I saw you silently object that the phrase is a contradiction in terms. You don't "capture" transience. Besides, you seemed to scoff, these paintings keep moving. They're alive. There's nothing captive in sight. "Transience," you added with a raised eyebrow – your skepticism now in full flow – shouldn't even be permitted as a noun.

But then colors, too, would have to operate only as verbs (eg. "the writer's face reddened as he wrote") because what is color if not relative, mercurial, irreducibly enigmatic? To say nothing of space, which is as elusive in Bartley's paintings as in the blackboard formulations of quantum physicists. Does Bartley capture color? Does he paint space? Or is he rather demonstrating the ways in which both are manifestations of the same phenomenon?

In Bartley's orchestrations of texture, transparency, and ravishingly effulgent color, you can feel the ghosts of Titian and Turner. The results, suggesting Piranesi-like depths, are evocative of grottoes or alpine fogs.

Or one's windscreen in a car wash! When the colored detergent is rinsed away and the space opens up in these paintings, it does so with thrilling suddenness. There's a sort of spiritual lurch (I think of Rosalie Gascoigne's Lake George-inspired assemblage, "Suddenly the Lake"). One's mind in response craves coordinates, composition, order (space is terrifying; the mind must master it). Bartley complies with his artful

emphasis on horizontals and verticals, echoing the warp and weft of the canvas. But one of the things I love about his paintings is that they feel only minimally composed. His sweeping translucent gestures and wristy, textured blotches embrace all kinds of arbitrary effects. It's exactly this quality of randomness that gives them the kick of truth.

Strange, nonetheless, how each painting evokes a specific if evanescent emotion. Some feel simple, plainspoken, almost disarming in their directness. Others, like the inner lives of one's children, embarrass you with their unguessed-at complexity. You cannot catalogue, for instance, the constituent parts of a painting like "Undress." Its interplay of rich and pale colors, its layering of light and dark, its choreographing of access and obstruction all absolutely defy language. The same goes for "Strewn," which presents an entirely different sense of space – protruding and impeding instead of receding and yielding.

"Arthur" recalls the palette and vertical divisions of Matisse's "French Window at Collioure." But where Matisse preferred taut opacity, Bartley's touch is all leakage and translucency. The palette of "Lost" sets pale blue and rich purple against deep forest greens and blacks. It is just stupefyingly lovely. And in the gorgeous, Howard Hodgkin-like "David," Bartley combines color-wheel complementaries (in this case greens and reds) with a whole suite of analogous hues (orange, purple, and red).

But catching your eye now, I saw you registering the futility and bad faith in this kind of analysis, which can't help but fall short. The beauty of Bartley's colors, you said (without speaking), is self-evident and doesn't require metaphors.

Yes, I said (or I might have), but his streaming, Heraclitean vision also has the capacity to evoke fleeting emotions and psychological states. Works like "Struggle" and "Jagged Little Pill," for instance, might conjure Gerard Manley Hopkins's apprehension of the troubled mind with its "mountains; cliffs of fall/ Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed." "Guarded," "Front" and "Be Careful What You Wish For," on the other hand, smack simply of sex – or at least, of a kind of ecstatic sensuousness.

But by now you had left the room.

Alone, I will tell you, you can get lost in Bartley's multitudinous paintings. They will dissolve you. You will tumble around in them. And as you spin, you will, like a lover, lose track of your contours, lose track of "you," and come to understand what Heraclitus meant when he said that no-one ever steps in the same river twice.

Sebastian Smee Art Critic Washington Post



Be Careful What You Wish For 2021 acrylic on board 60 x 60 cm



See Through 2021 acrylic on board 40 x 40 cm



Head On 2021 acrylic on board 40 x 40 cm



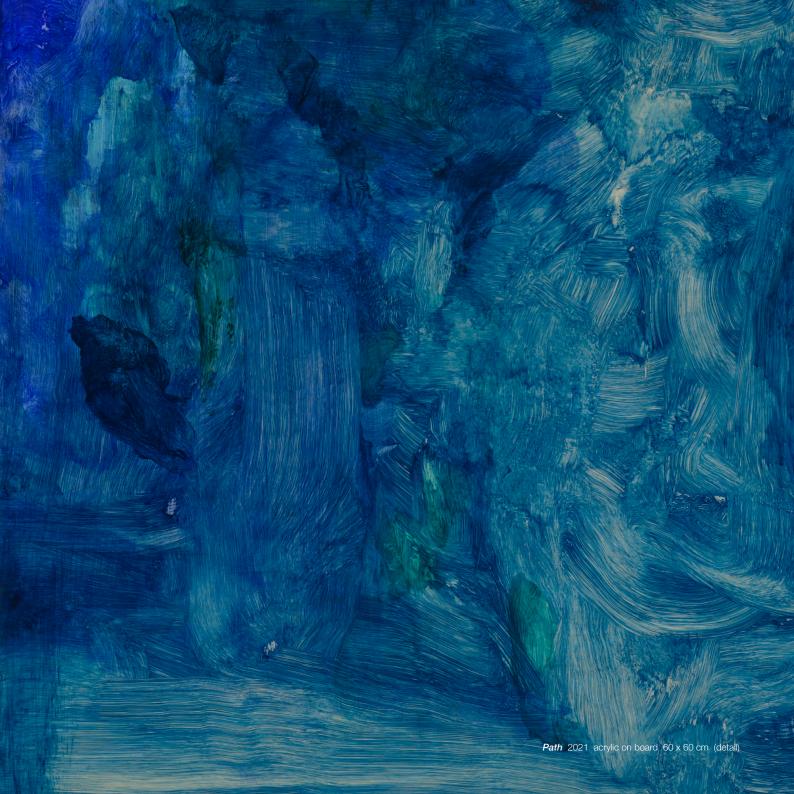
Little Landscape 2022 acrylic on canvas 30 x 30 cm



Norman 2021 acrylic on board 60 x 60 cm



Yesterday 2022 acrylic on canvas 125 x 85 cm





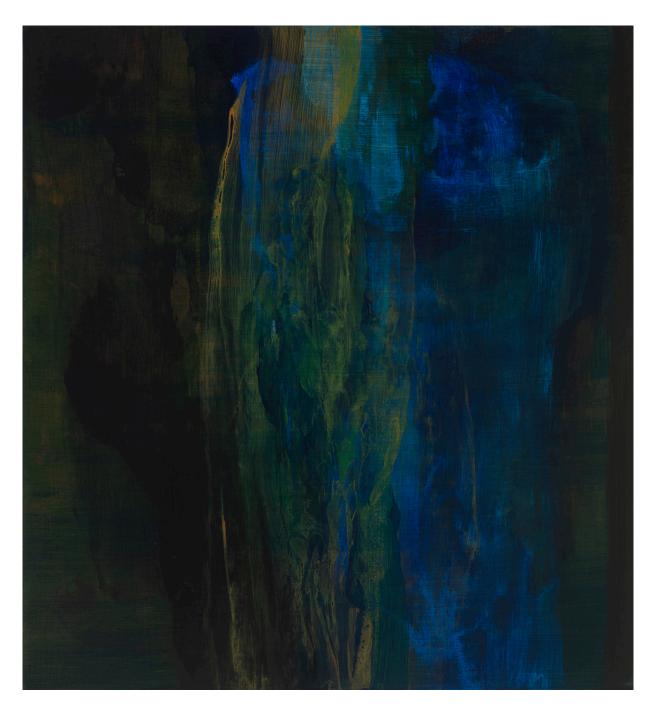
Front 2022 acrylic on board 38 x 30 cm



Strewn 2022 acrylic on board 60 x 60 cm



Naked 2022 acrylic on board 42 x 32 cm



Mish 2021 acrylic on board 60 x 55 cm



David 2021 acrylic on canvas 40 x 45 cm



Fortress 2021 acrylic on board 55 x 60 cm



Something but Nothing 2021 acrylic on board 42 x 32 cm



Struggle 2021 acrylic on board 35 x 38 cm



Enough Said 2022 acrylic on board 60 x 119 cm

16 Image courtesy of the artist



Guarded 2021 acrylic on board 42 x 32 cm



Jagged Little Pill 2021 acrylic on board 40 x 40 cm



Temptation 2021 acrylic on board 40 x 30 cm



Babylon 2022 acrylic on canvas 125 x 175 cm

20 Image courtesy of the artist



Belly 2021 acrylic on board 40 x 40 cm





Shimmer 2021 acrylic on board 40 x 40 cm



Lost 2022 acrylic on board 40 x 40 cm



It Could be You 2022 acrylic on board 60 x 55 cm

John Bartley

Born

1956 Sydney, Australia

Education

Art Certificate & Higher Art Certificate East Sydney Technical College 1986-88

Solo Exhibitions

2022	Something but Nothing King Street Gallery on William, Sydney
2020	Dark beautiful King Street Gallery on William
2018	Tweed, Hill End, Home Watters Gallery, Sydney
2016	Outside Watters Gallery
2014	On a Clear Day Watters Gallery
2012	Songs to the Siren Watters Gallery
2010	Air Watters Gallery
2009	Coming Up for Air Legge Gallery, Sydney
2007	Treading Water Legge Gallery
2006	Voyages Legge Gallery
2003	Saints Legge Gallery
2002	5 and 7 Legge Gallery
2001	High-key Holes Legge Gallery
1999	Devils In The Backseat Legge Gallery
1998	On The Wing Legge Gallery
1997	Belly Songs Legge Gallery
1996	Actually I've Always Wanted To Be A Singer! (a reprise) Legge Gallery
1995	Buildings, Food, God, Sex, Life, Death Legge Gallery
1994	Upstairs Legge Gallery
1993	Dark Cars With Maps Legge Gallery
1992	Progression Through Loss Legge Gallery
1991	Actually I've Always Wanted To Be A Singer Legge Gallery

Group Exhibitions [selected]

1990

Drawings Legge Gallery

Looking For Jack Legge Gallery

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2019	Inside/Outside King Street Gallery on William, Sydney
	Abstract '19 King Street Gallery on William
2018	Salon des Refusés S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney
2016	Salon des Refusés S.H. Ervin Gallery & Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery
2014	Watters Gallery 50th Anniversary Exhibition Watters Gallery
2013	Salon des Refusés S.H. Ervin Gallery
2012	Mosman Art Prize Mosman Council
	Stand Up Close: Remembering Ron Lambert Wollongong City Gallery
	Melbourne Art Fair 2012 Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne
	Gallipoli Art Prize Gallipoli Club, Sydney
2011	Salon des Refusés S.H. Ervin Gallery and Tweed River Regional Art Gallery, Murwillumbah, NSW
	Frank's Flat Maitland Regional Art Gallery, NSW
2010	Melbourne Art Fair 2010 Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne

2009 2008	John Bartley, Vivienne Ferguson & Derek O'Connor Legge Gallery. Salon des Refusés S.H. Ervin Gallery and Tweed River Art Gallery Murwillumbah Melbourne Art Fair 2008 Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne
2007	Salon des Refusés S.H. Ervin Gallery Art Sydney 2007 Royal Hall of Industries, Moore Park, Sydney
2006	Salon des Refusés S.H. Ervin Gallery Melbourne Art Fair 2006 Royal Exhibition Building John Bartley and Vivienne Ferguson at Silvershot Melbourne The Year in Art S.H. Ervin Gallery
2005	Salon des Refusés S.H. Ervin Gallery
2004	Depth of Field – Anamorphosis Utopia Art Sydney
	Mosman Art Prize Mosman Council
	Melbourne Art Fair 2004 Royal Exhibition Building
2003	The Year in Art S.H. Ervin Gallery
2002	Melbourne Art Fair 2002 Royal Exhibition Building
2000	Seventh Australian Contemporary Art Fair Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne, Vic
1999	University & Schools Club Art Prize Sydney
1998	Salon des Refusés S.H. Ervin Gallery
	Sixth Australian Contemporary Art Fair Royal Exhibition Building
	The Bryan Niland Collection Penrith Regional Gallery, NSW
1996	Fifth Australian Contemporary Art Fair Royal Exhibition Building
1994	Fourth Australian Contemporary Art Fair Royal Exhibition Building
1992	Salon des Refusés S.H. Ervin Gallery
1991	Common Sense Curated by Jacques Delaruelle, University of South Australia, SA
1990	Mosman Art Prize Mosman Council
	Common Sense Curated by Jacques Delaruelle, King Street Gallery on Burton
1989	Inside the Greenhouse Tin Sheds Gallery
1988	Faber-Castell Drawing Prize Rex Irwin Gallery
	Graduating Show East Sydney Technical College, Cell Block Theatre

Awards & Residencies

2019	Police Point, Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery
2017	Hill End, Haefligers Cottage, Bathurst Regional Art Gallery
2016	Tweed Regional Gallery, AIR
2015	Tweed Regional Gallery, AIR
2012	Henry Bucks - Commendation Prize Mosman Art Prize
1990	Mosman Art Prize, Sydney

Collections

Allens Collection Faber-Castell

Artbank Federal Law Court of Australia

Baker and McKenzie Laverty Collection

BHP Billiton Mosman Council Collection
Clayton Utz Collection University & Schools Club





Layover 2021 acrylic on board 30 x 40 cm

King Street Gallery KS on William GW



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