

Idris Murphy
Vibrations of the Primal



Cockburn Ranges, WA, 2025
Photograph courtesy Glennis Murphy

Idris Murphy

Vibrations of the Primal

26 August - 20 September, 2025



King Street Gallery
on William

This exhibition is dedicated to Kevin Connor. Kevin was a long term friend and a long while back was my teacher and mentor at the National Art School.

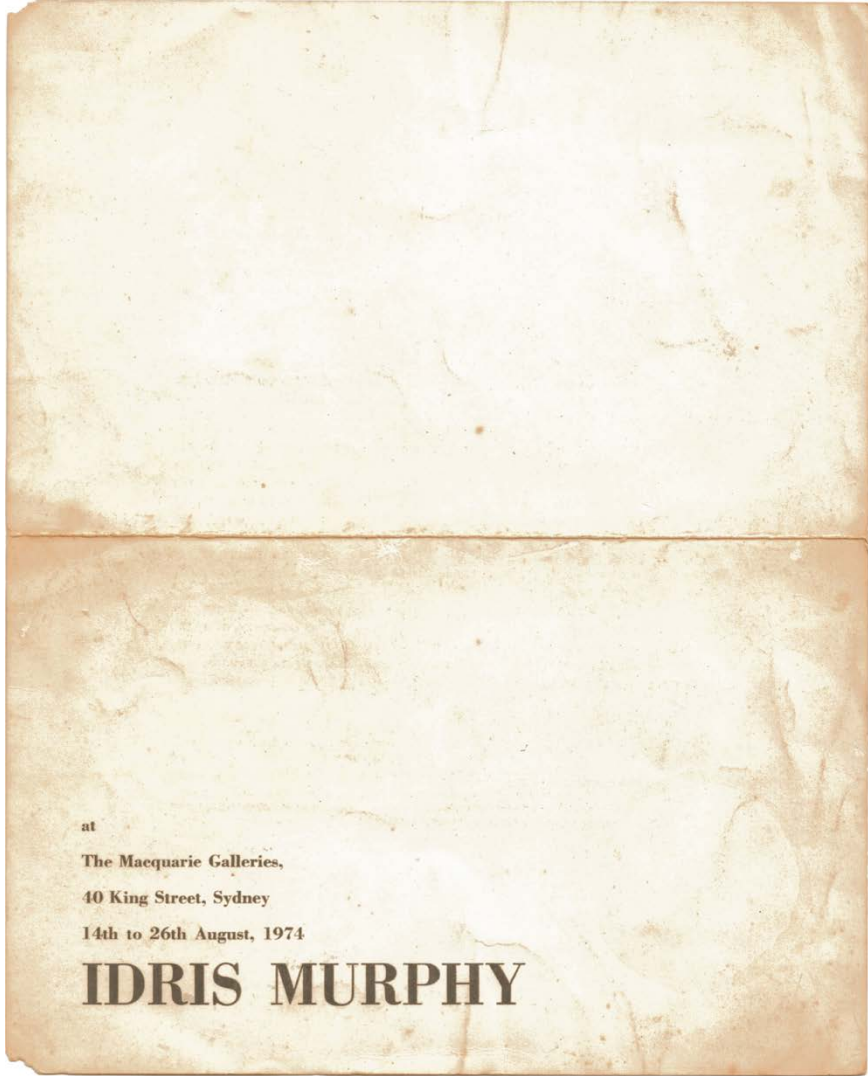
I will remember his humility, humour and his humanity. The love he has given and love received—especially within his family—this has also flowed into his friendships, his work and the influence he has as an artist.

Lloyd Rees once told me that your paintings are like your children. You don't want to let them go, however they need to go out into the world to be fully themselves.

Kevin has in this sense given the world children of merit and distinction.

Idris Murphy, 2025





Catalogue for Idris Murphy's second solo exhibiiton, 1974



Catalogue for Idris Murphy's second solo exhibiiton, 1974



River Crossing, 2024-25, collage and acrylic on board, 83 x 88 cm

Vibrations of the Primal

Idris Murphy has been exhibiting his paintings professionally for more than half a century. Since his first solo show at the Macquarie Galleries in Sydney in 1972, through to his most recent exhibitions at the King Street Gallery on William, there has been a discernible shift from his early figurative and landscape paintings to his more recent work where the landscape element has remained constant, but the literal and mimetic elements have largely faded from view.

There is something increasingly ‘primal’ in his art – something that speaks of essence and something that is deeply rooted in our psyche. It is an art that reflects the beginning of a direct response to country or habitat and one that seems to bypass conscious thought and verbal explanations. He increasingly seems to adopt an instinctive response to country, but one that has been distilled through many decades of art practice.

Murphy refers to George Steiner’s *Real Presences* (1989), a book that famously attacked the deconstruction movement that was popular in literature and the arts and that, according to Steiner, created “the house of mirrors which is that of modernist theory and practice”. Steiner stressed the need to explore the power and presence of the unseen in art, in other words, seek out meaning and the spiritual in art.

Murphy’s new body of paintings possess a majesty and grandeur but are completely devoid of trickery and technical wizardry. They assert a spiritual and physical presence and, while conscious of topography and you may be able to discern a tree, shrub or rock form, they are not anchored in a specificity. The peculiarities in Murphy’s working method, like the use of metallic pigments to provide a luminosity to the surfaces, evokes a deeply sonorous, even musical quality in these paintings.

If Suzi Gablik spoke of the ‘re-enchantment’ of art (1991), Murphy’s primal landscapes reintroduce the sense of awe, enchantment and mystery to the country that he describes in his paintings. Many of the paintings possess a warm glow and, despite their structural simplicity, have a chromatic richness. As a student in Europe, he was drawn to the work of David Hockney and Howard Hodgkin and the quality of directness, naïve simplicity and love of textured blocks of colour have never left him. In Australia, he was attracted to the work of First Nations artists and particularly the art practice of Ginger Riley Munduwalawala, who was known for his bright palette and for his depiction of simplified mythological creatures who formed his country of the Gulf of Carpentaria.

While it is impossible to confuse Murphy’s art with that of Aboriginal painting – his art is highly distinctive and you can pick one of his paintings at fifty metres – his paintings, especially the most recent work, possess a strong spiritual presence and an enchanted state of being. Despite their high chromatic value with glowing colours, they are quiet meditative paintings that tend to absorb you. They encourage you to enter into them, quite literally to take a walk inside them, and through this journey establish your own reality and your own dialogue with the forms depicted. They encourage a form of meditation through the image where you develop your own relationship with the depicted reality. Murphy does not describe the reality that he depicts but articulates a relationship with this reality that suggests that he has entered into a special spiritual dialogue with it.

Emeritus Professor Sasha Grishin AM, FAHA
Australian National University





Reflections of Ruby Gap, 2024-25, acrylic on board, 123 x 123 cm



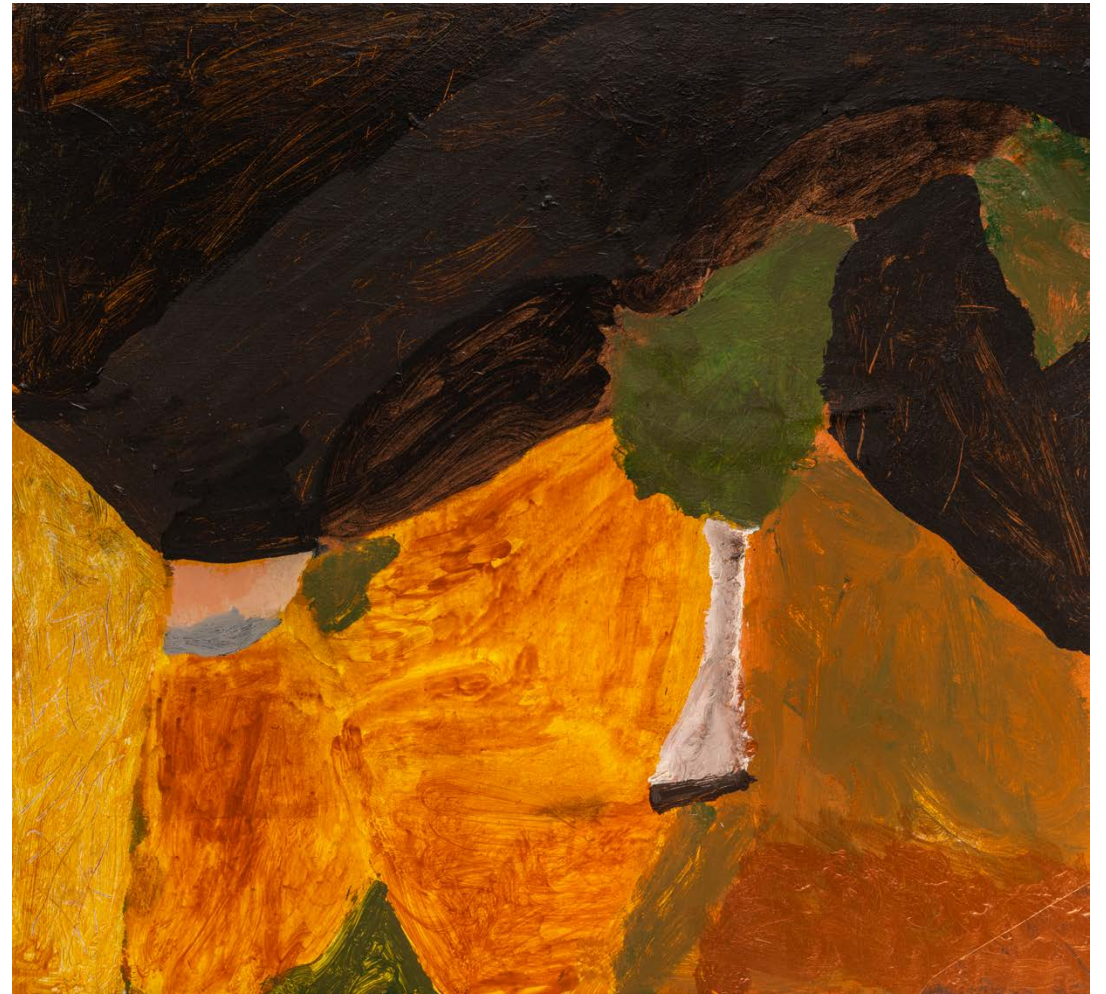
King River, WA, 2025
Photograph courtesy Scotty Connel



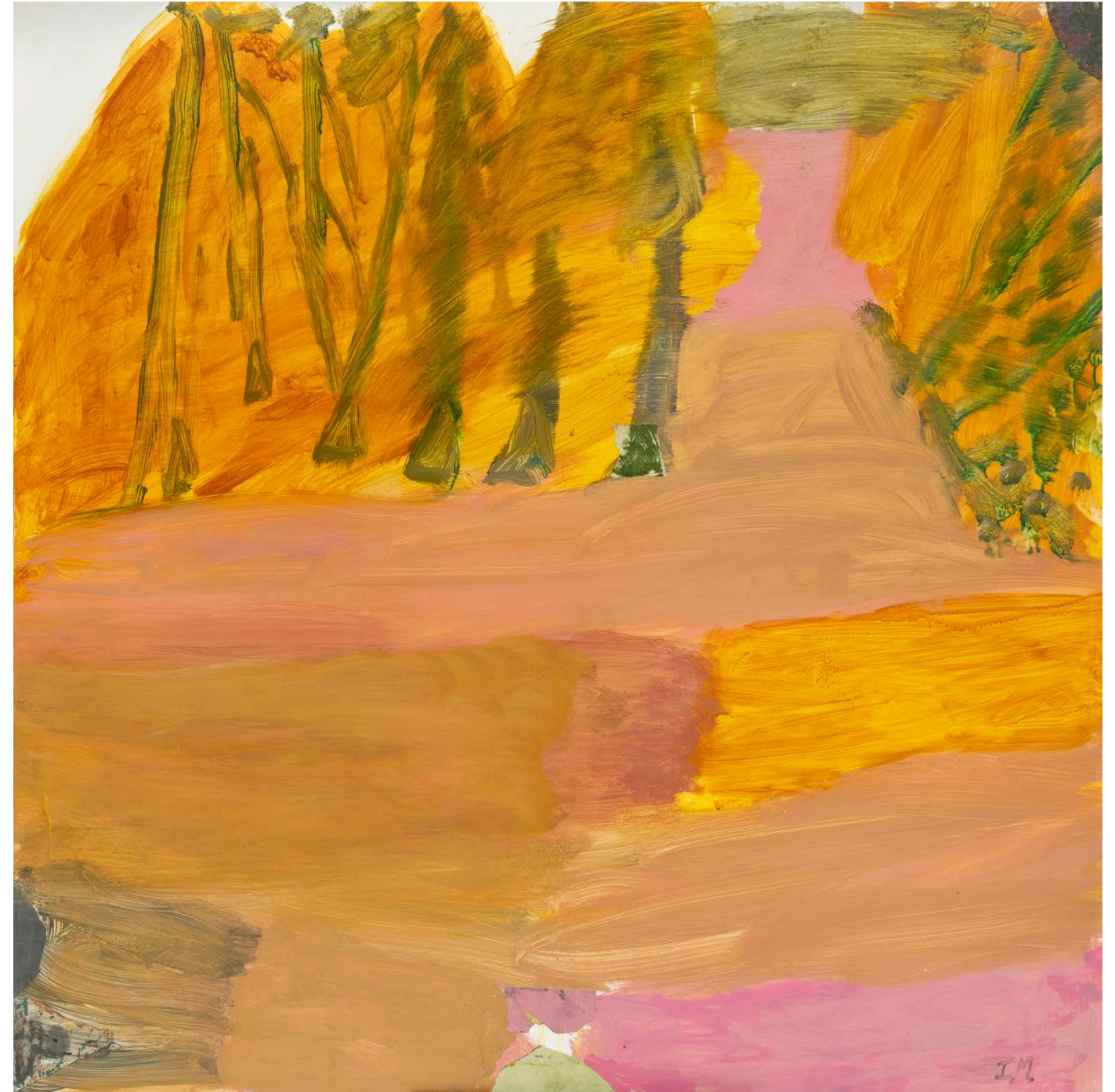




Emily Gorge, NT, 2025
 Photograph courtesy Glennis Murphy



Chain of Ponds, East Macdonnell Ranges, 2024-25, collage and acrylic on board, 58 x 63 cm





Tree and Rock Face, East Macdonnell Ranges, 2024-25, acrylic on aluminium, 118 x 118 cm

Artist Statement

Most artists I know don't take too kindly to writing their 'artist statement'.

Firstly because they have spent a great deal of time making a group of works, which are supposed to (as the cliché goes) speak for themselves. Add to that, the word 'statement' becomes somewhat problematic.

What fits? Expression of views, affirmation, assertion, announcement, utterance?

How do artists discuss what they have produced? Poets, the writers, the philosopher, those whose works are words, make more coherent statements, particularly when their views are about paintings and the landscape, which this statement proposes to be concerned with.

Simon Sharma suggests the first landscapes were the mounds where we first buried our dead.

Indigenous people in Australia have given a whole other meaning to the word 'Country.' so, seeing and looking, responding to Country is also a 'take-in': and words need to be rethought.

Christopher Neve, in the introduction of his book the *Unquiet Landscape*, gives an insight (this word itself an introduction) when artists fumble to talk about what they see and what they have made.

'Painting is a risky process precisely because of the trials and errors and intuitive revisions that this kind of inarticulate thought involves.

But the truth strikes you, when you see it, as unmistakable because it represents not just a way of seeing the landscape but a state of mind.

It is in such half-formed ideas that painters will sometimes discuss, because their thoughts are at an angle to the pictures themselves and do not impinge too much upon them.'

Picasso said that some artists seek, I find: and although he was being a bit of a smart arse, he was no doubt onto something when making a painting. the problem of seeing, and finding.

Never as simple as a statement, however Annie Dillard may help when she writes about seeing.

The secret of seeing is, then, the pearl of great price. If I thought he could teach me to find it and keep it forever I would stagger barefoot across a hundred deserts after any lunatic at all, but while the pearl may be found, it may not be sought. The literature of illumination reveals this above all: Although it comes to those who wait for it, it is always, even to the most practiced and adept, a gift and a total surprise.

Idris Murphy
2025



Gorge and Waterfall, WA, 2025
 Photograph courtesy Glennis Murphy



White Tree in Gorge Country, 2024-25, acrylic and collage on board, 58 x 63 cm





Cockburn Ranges, WA, 2025
Photograph courtesy Glennis Murphy



Abindoole Creek, Home Valley, WA, 2025
Photograph courtesy Glennis Murphy





Flood Tree Hale River, NT, 2024-25, acrylic on board, 46 x 45 cm



Windy Day, Pink Sand, 2024-25, acrylic on board, 46 x 45 cm



Chamberlain river, WA, 2025
 Photograph courtesy Glennis Murphy



Suspended Silver Tree, 2024-25, acrylic on board, 46x45cm



Waterfall, WA, 2025
Photograph courtesy Glennis Murphy



Two Types Of Light, 2024-25, acrylic on board, 46x45cm





Driving Into Ruby Gap, 2024-25, acrylic on board, 93 x 93 cm

Idris Murphy shares his thanks to all First Nations people,
upon whose land he has walked and worked

Idris Murphy

Selected Biography

Born 1949, Sydney, NSW, Australia

Education & employment

1988-2007 Lecturer, College of Fine Art (COFA), University of New South Wales, Sydney
1997 Head of Drawing, National Art School, Sydney
1994 Doctorate of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, NSW
1989 Graduate Diploma (Education), Sydney College of Advanced Education, Sydney
1987 Lecturer, TAFE School of Art and Design, Sydney
1984-86 Part time lecturer, Alexander Mackie College of Fine Art & City Art Institute (now COFA)
1982 Lecturer, University of Wollongong, NSW
1980-82 Part time lecturer, Wollongong TAFE
1976-77 Postgraduate (painting & printmaking), Winchester College of Art, UK
1966-71 Diploma (painting), National Art School, Sydney

Solo exhibitions [Selected from the past decade]

2025 *Vibrations of the Primal* King Street Gallery on William, Sydney
2024 *Reading the Other* Mitchell Fine Art, Fortitude Valley, Brisbane, QLD
2023 *Active Surrender* King Street Gallery on William
2022–23 *Backblocks* The ANU Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra; Orange Regional Art Gallery, Orange, NSW; S. H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney
2022 *Now and Then* Mitchell Fine Art, Fortitude Valley, Brisbane
2021 *The Abundance* King Street Gallery on William
2019 *Empyrean: scattering of stars* King Street Gallery on William
2017 *Real Presence* King Street Gallery on William
New Work Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne
2016 *Drawing Breath [works on paper & heliographs]* King Street Gallery on William
2015 *Tide-Lands* King Street Gallery on William

Group Exhibitions [Selected from last five years]

2025 *TIDELAND: Works from the SECCA Collection* South East Centre for Contemporary Art, Bega, NSW
Tranquillity 2025, Liverpool St Gallery, Sydney
Sanctuary: 25 Years of Hazelhurst Hazelhurst Regional Gallery, Hazelhurst, NSW
2024 *Landscape Tells the Way: Illawarra* Wollongong Art Gallery, Wollongong, NSW
Ode to Country Delmar Gallery, Trinity Grammar School, Sydney NSW
2022 *Earth Canvas* National Museum of Australia, Canberra
2021 *The Hadley's Prize* Hobart, Tasmania
Tree of Life: A testament to endurance S.H. Ervin Gallery
2020 *Earth Canvas* [Touring Exhibition] Albury Library Museum, Albury, NSW

Awards & residencies

2019 NSW State Library Artist in Residence, Sydney
2017 The Western Front, France
2016 Moonee Beach Artist in Residence, Coffs Harbour Regional Art Gallery, NSW
2013-14 Waiheke Island Residency in association with Waiheke Community Arts Centre, New Zealand

2011 Working tour of Fowlers Gap & Broken Hill, NSW by invitation of Artist Profile Magazine
2009 Working tour of New Zealand's North Island by invitation of Artist Profile Magazine
1994 Irish Arts Council Studio, Tyron Guthrie Centre, Ireland
1987 French Government Studio, Paris
Moya Doring Memorial Residence, Paris
1983 Lithographer in Residence, Art Gallery of New South Wales
French Government Studio
1978 Moya Doring Memorial Residence
1977-79 Dyson Bequests Fund for Australian Artists Overseas
1976 Australian Arts Council Special travel scholarship: Europe and America
Rockhampton Art Prize, Rockhampton Regional Art Gallery, Qld
Studio residency, London
Moya Doring Memorial Residence
Keith and Elizabeth Murdoch Travel Fellowship
1975 Artist in Residence, Prahran College of Art, Melbourne
1974 Hunters Hill Art Award, Hunters Hill Municipal Council, Sydney

Selected Collections

Australian Library of Art, State Library of Queensland, Qld
Artbank, Australia
Art Gallery of New South Wales, NSW
Bendigo Regional Art Gallery, NSW
Bibliothèque National de Paris, Paris
Broken Hill Regional Art Gallery, NSW
Charles Sturt University, NSW
Clot/Bramsen et Georges Studio, Paris
Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery, NSW
Cowra Regional Art Gallery, NSW
Drill Hall Gallery, Australian National University, ACT
Gallipoli Memorial Club, NSW
Ipswich Art Gallery, Qld
Kedumba Drawing Collection, NSW
Long Gallery & Art Collection, University of Wollongong, NSW
Macquarie Bank, Australia
National Gallery of Australia, ACT
National Library of Australia, ACT
Orange Regional Gallery, NSW
Parliament House, ACT
Rockhampton Regional Art Gallery, Qld
South East Centre for Contemporary Art, NSW
State Library of New South Wales, NSW
Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Ireland
University of New South Wales, NSW
Westpac Collection, Australia



A comprehensive CV for Idris Murphy is available on the King Street Gallery on William website
kingstreetgallery.com.au/artists/idris-murphy/



Idris Murphy
www.idrismurphy.com

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Cover:
Detail from *A Ghost Tree and Late Light*,
2024-25, acrylic on aluminium,
118 x 118 cm, p15.



King Street Gallery
on William

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