

PAUL CONNOR

Ocean

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7 – 28 March 2026

Sailors and poets have made much of the power of the mistral, the nor'wester that blows from the south of France into the northern Mediterranean. Yet, when Paul Connor visited Provence some years ago, he felt the mistral was just “a strong sea breeze,” one that could not compare to the sudden violence of the black nor'easters he had faced on Australia's eastern seaboard.

“The idea of being alone and in weather” is one of the unifying elements that runs through Connor's latest paintings in *Ocean*. It is an experience with which the artist is familiar. Raised on Sydney Harbour since his family returned to Australia from the United States in the late 1960s, Connor has kayaked and sailed for decades. He holds a reverence for maritime history and the achievements of sailors and explorers—he has even built boats, a meeting of sorts between his work as an architect and his love of the water.

As a painter, Connor worked for many years exclusively *en plein air*. Observation of the landscape remains an essential part of Connor's practice—but, increasingly, he relies on what he calls his “memory bank” or “kit bag” of recollected images. The works in *Ocean* explore the idea of painting as intuition, each an opportunity for Connor to “evoke the emotion I'm remembering,” rather than as acts of representation.

One visitor to Connor's Leichhardt studio was convinced that one of the buildings in Harbour's *Lilting Song*, 2026, was the Colgate Palmolive building in Balmain. It may be there, somewhere, filed away in Connor's catalogue of forms. But the paintings in *Ocean* do not depict recognisable vantages from around the Harbour—rather, Connor's subjects are the ocean and the weather themselves, and the feelings of wilderness and mystery that each evokes.

Material cues have guided this body of work. Using Golden paints—“pigment-rich, fast-drying and sticky”—on “linen of a certain gauge,” Connor has arrived at the ideal conditions to control the tempo as he works. Some paintings emerge quickly. Others are palimpsests, with as many as five completed paintings laying beneath a work’s final surface. More than mere revisions, each painting may be an entirely different subject. The layers beneath may reveal themselves (a glimpse of Fowler’s Gap, for example, beneath an ocean landscape, as in *Remnant Ancient Inland Sea*, 2026), or they may be wholly obscured. Only Connor—and the painting itself—retain the memory of what lies beneath, the piecing together of a story from “memories of different things at different stages.”

A student of painting and of art history, Connor describes his practice as an act of “worrying”—a keenness to get at something, whatever that may be. Equally, though, Connor understands the importance of letting a painting get away from conscious, deliberate actions, allowing the chance for the artist’s knowledge about painting and his intuition to arrive at something surprising.

There is a quote along these lines that Connor recalls from Philip Guston, in turn quoting what Guston was told by the composer John Cage:

“When you start working, everybody is in your studio—the past, your friends, enemies, the art world, and above all, your own ideas—all are there. But as you continue painting, they start leaving, one by one, and you are left completely alone. Then, if you’re lucky, even you leave.”

Connor is determined to “move away from the trappings of painting,” and speaks of his suspicion of art that is decorative, tangible or “skilful for its own sake.” There is, equally, an aversion in Connor’s paintings to anything that he sees as “too clever,” by which the artist means anything that causes him to “think about other people’s reactions.” When painting over earlier works, he speaks about the second-guessing involved when deciding to cover “a really nice bit.” But, says Connor, “it’s about being brave enough to lose the best bit,” avoiding sentiment or attachment in service of a better painting. It is far more important in his mind “to grab an idea and push it, to never be afraid to do something different.” Connor admires Guston, Chaim Soutine and Ken Whisson—and his own father—as painters who achieved that resolve in their work.

Yet, again as a student of art history, Connor believes that as an artist, “you place yourself where you are.” For the present moment, that means coming to terms with a world of rising tides—politically unbalanced, socially tense, environmentally precipitous—all while living in a country that “clings to the rim,” with such a clearly defined sense of perimeter and interior. Connor relishes in the challenge of the unsafe harbour he has found in the compelling wilderness of the ocean. In so doing, he has created a suite of paintings that are, at once, primordial and contemporary.





Ghost Ships, Horizon
gouache & acrylic on linen
102 x 102 cm, 105 x 105 cm (framed)
\$6,400



Desert Owl (Ancient Inland Sea)

gouache & acrylic on linen

102 x 102 cm, 105 x 105 cm (framed)

\$6,400



Port City, Evening
gouache & acrylic on linen
102 x 102 cm, 105 x 105 cm (framed)
\$6,400



Embarking, High Seas
gouache & acrylic on linen
102 x 102 cm, 105 x 105 cm (framed)
\$6,400



Morning Harbour with Ghost Skiff

gouache & acrylic on linen

102 x 102 cm, 105 x 105 cm (framed)

\$6,400



Three Torches (Coast)
gouache & acrylic on linen
102 x 102 cm, 105 x 105 cm (framed)
\$6,400



Harbour City (Edge of Wilderness)

gouache & acrylic on linen

102 x 102 cm, 105 x 105 cm (framed)

\$6,400





Ghost Skiff 's Sea Passage

gouache & acrylic on linen

102 x 102 cm, 105 x 105 cm (framed)

\$6,400



Black Nor-Easter (Harbour)

gouache & acrylic on linen

100 x 100 cm, 103 x 103 cm (framed)

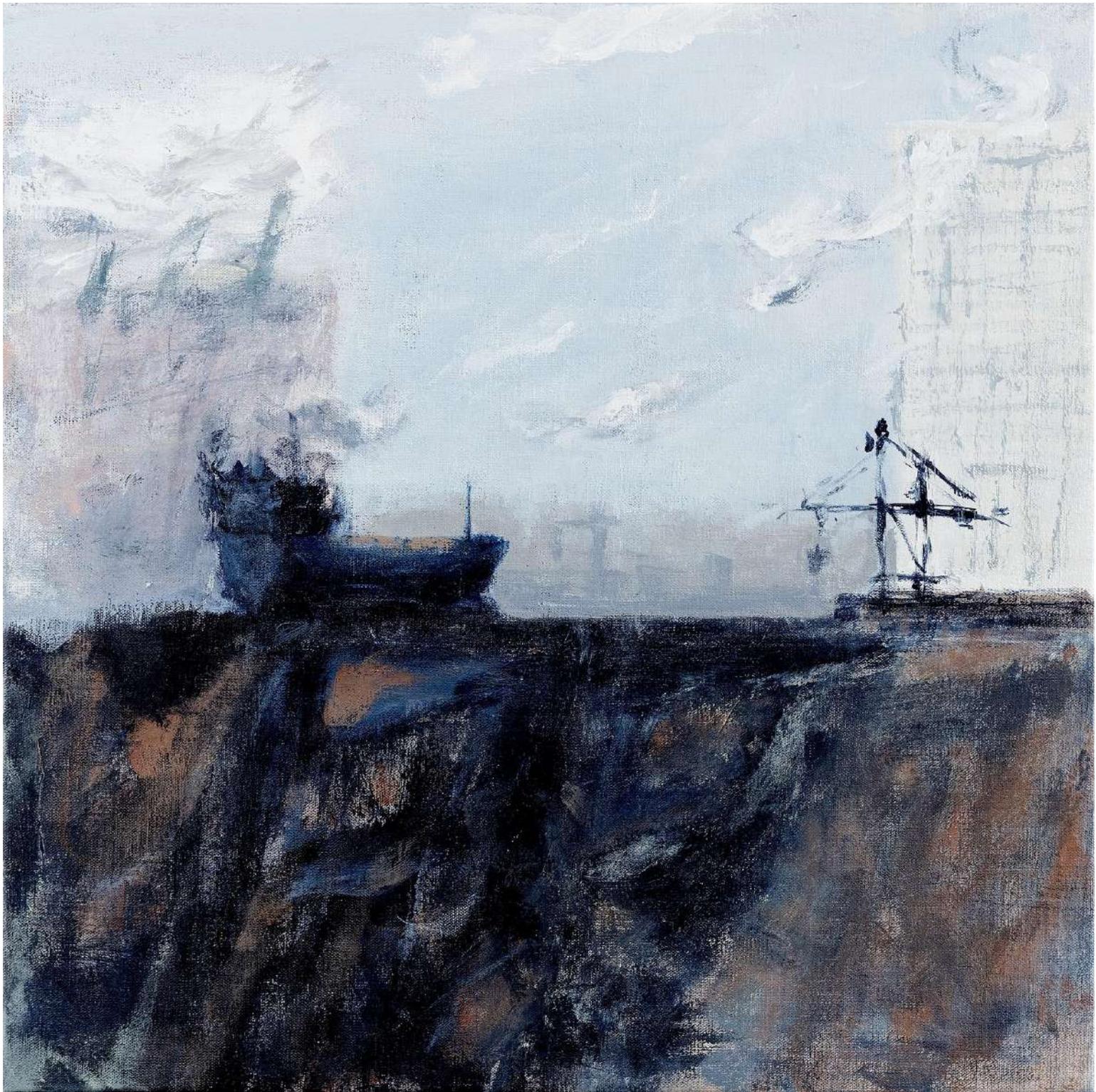
\$6,400



Harbour's Liltin' Song
gouache & acrylic on linen
56 x 56 cm, 59 x 59 cm (framed)
\$3,200



Remnant Ancient Inland Sea
gouache & acrylic on linen
61 x 56 cm, 64 x 59 cm (framed)
\$3,200



Sea Breeze Harbour Dance
gouache & acrylic on linen
56 x 56 cm, 59 x 59 cm (framed)
\$3,200



Wild Ocean's Harbour
gouache & acrylic on linen
56 x 56 cm, 59 x 59 cm (framed)
\$3,200



Port Song
gouache & acrylic on linen
56 x 56 cm, 59 x 59 cm (framed)
\$3,200



Winter Coast Sailing
gouache & acrylic on linen
61 x 56 cm, 64 x 59 cm (framed)
\$3,200





Ship Percussion
gouache & acrylic on linen
56 x 56 cm, 59 x 59 cm (framed)
\$3,200



Embarking
gouache & acrylic on linen
56 x 56 cm, 59 x 59 cm (framed)
\$3,200



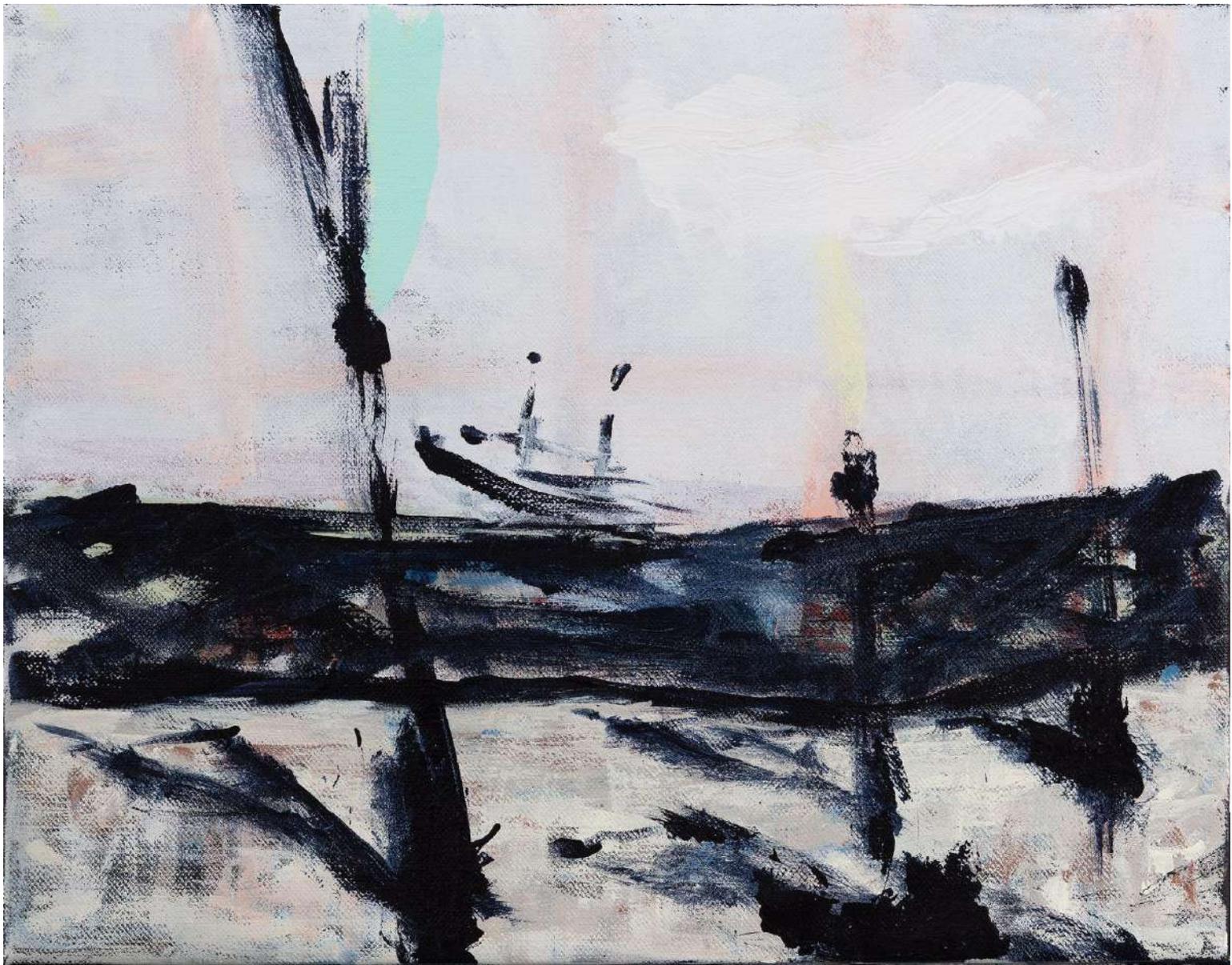
Winter Swell (After the Fire)
gouache & acrylic on linen
37 x 47 cm, 40 x 50 cm (framed)
\$2,200



Rough Passage
gouache & acrylic on linen
37 x 47 cm, 40 x 50 cm (framed)
\$2,200



Harbour Mooring (Nor-Easter)
gouache & acrylic on linen
56 x 56 cm, 59 x 59 cm (framed)
\$3,200

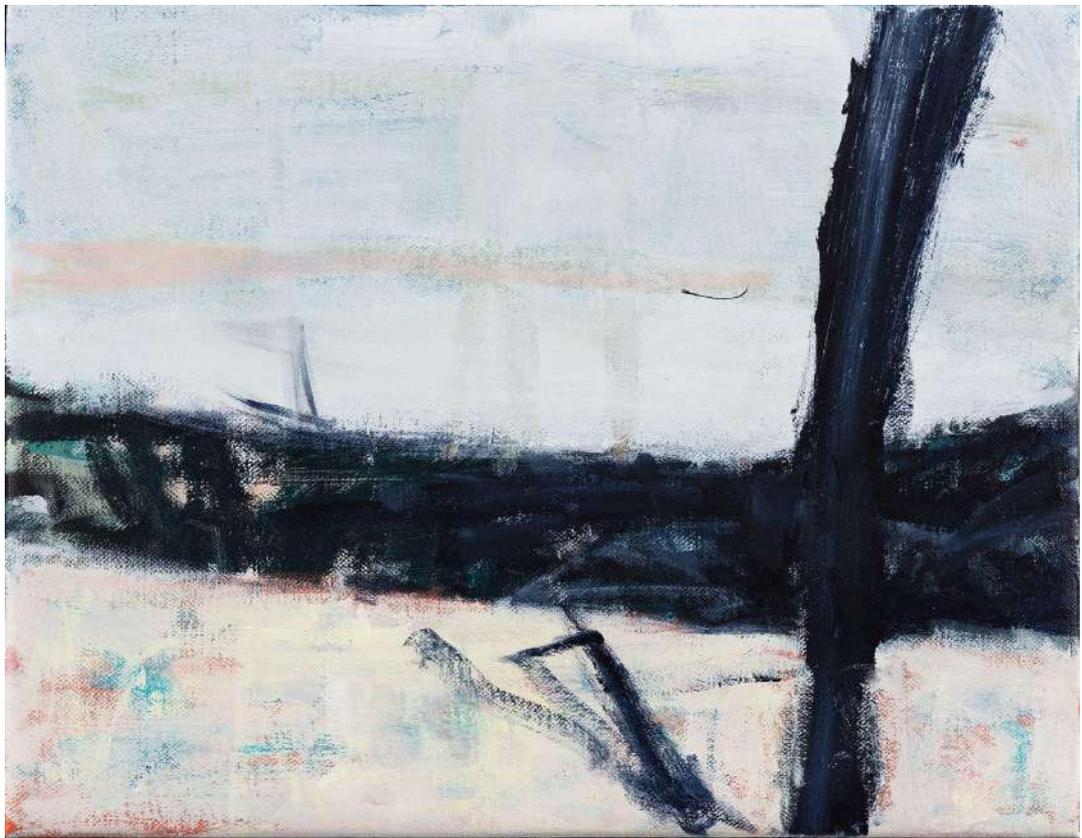


Horizon Ship (After the Fire)
gouache & acrylic on linen
37 x 47 cm, 40 x 50 cm (framed)
\$2,200



Winter Ocean Sailing
gouache & acrylic on linen
56 x 56 cm, 59 x 59 cm (framed)
\$3,200

Summer Skiff
gouache & acrylic on linen
37 x 47 cm, 40 x 50 cm (framed)
\$2,200



Summer Swell (After the Fire)
gouache & acrylic on linen
37 x 47 cm, 40 x 50 cm (framed)
\$2,200



PAUL CONNOR CV

EDUCATION

- 1996 Masters – College of Fine Art, UNSW
1986 Bachelor – Architecture, The University of Sydney

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2026 Ocean, Defiance Gallery, Sydney
2024 Art Atrium, Sydney
2022 Protest Paintings, Art Atrium, Sydney
2020 Art Atrium, Sydney
2018 Art Atrium, Sydney
2016 Syndicate/Spot 81, Sydney
2014 Syndicate/Spot 81, Sydney
2012 Syndicate/Spot 81, Sydney
2010 Syndicate/Spot 81, Sydney
2006 Robin Gibson Gallery, Sydney
2004 Robin Gibson Gallery, Sydney
2002 Robin Gibson Gallery, Sydney
1999 Robin Gibson Gallery, Sydney
1996 Robin Gibson Gallery, Sydney

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2025 Blow Back Ins, Broken Hill Regional Art Gallery, Broken Hill, NSW
2022 Sydney Contemporary Art Fair, Art Atrium, Carriageworks, Sydney
2021 Here/There, Art Central, Hong Kong
2020 Sydney Contemporary Art Fair, Art Atrium, Carriageworks, Sydney
2019 Art Central, Hong Kong
2018 Sydney Contemporary Art Fair, Art Atrium, Carriageworks, Sydney
Art Central, Hong Kong
2015 The Piano Has been Drinking (not me), Maitland Regional Art Gallery,
Maitland, NSW

AWARDS & RESIDENCIES

- 2025 Paddington Art Prize, Coeee Art Leven, Sydney
KAAF Art Prize, Korean Australian Art Foundation, Sydney
Vincent Art Prize, Scratch Art Space, Sydney
Mosman Art Prize, Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney

Glover Prize, Tasmania

Kedumba Drawing Prize, Katoomba, NSW

2024 Winner, Pro Hart Outback Art Prize, Broken Hill Regional Gallery, NSW

2023 Paddington Art Prize, Coeee Art Leven, Sydney

Vincent Art Prize, Scratch Art Space, Sydney

Fishers Ghost Award, Campbelltown ARts Center, Sydney

Elaine Bermingham National Watercolour Prize, Griffith University, NSW

2022 KAAF Art Prize, Korean Australian Art Foundation, Sydney

2021 Paddington Art Prize, Defiance Gallery, Sydney

Calleen Art Award, Cowra Regional Art Gallery, NSW

Lethbridge Prize, Lethbridge Gallery, Paddington, QLD

Georges River Art Prize, Hurstville Museum and Gallery, Sydney

Blacktown City Art Prize, Blacktown Arts Center, Sydney

2020 Paddington Art Prize, Defiance Gallery, Sydney

Mosman Art Prize, Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney

2019 Winner, Pro Hart Outback Art Prize, Broken Hill Regional Gallery

2018 KAAF Art Prize, Korean Australian Art Foundation, Sydney

2017 KAAF Art Prize, Korean Australian Art Foundation, Sydney

Semi-Finalist, Doug Moran Portrait Prize, Sydney

2016 NSW En Plein Air Painting Prize, NSW Parliament House, Sydney

2015 NSW En Plein Air Painting Prize, NSW Parliament House, Sydney

2013 NSW En Plein Air Painting Prize, NSW Parliament House, Sydney

2006 Salon des Refuses, S.H.Ervin Gallery, Sydney

1990 Academie D'Architecture year residency at Cité Internationale Des Arts

COLLECTIONS

Art Bank

Broken Hill Regional Art Gallery

Maitland Regional Art Gallery

Tweed Regional Art Gallery

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Linda Morris, Cover Versions a Tribute to Strong Stories, The Sydney Morning Herald Nov 30, 2011

Elizabeth Fortescue, The Silence of The Clams, Daily Telegraph Art Feature Sept 27, 2010

Andrew Taylor, Port Jackson En Plein Air, The Sydney Morning Herald May 17, 2010

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