



LISA ADAMS



In 2003 Lisa Adams travelled overseas for the first time, an experience that proved seminal. Visiting galleries and museums she encountered works by artists she had long admired but known only in reproduction, in the flesh. *Thinking*, 2004 finds the artist in a contemplative mood. A seductive self-portrait of the artist floating in a sea of inky green, it encapsulates Adam's reflection on her return on all that she had seen abroad. It succinctly captures the overwhelming nature of her international experience with all that it brought, and all that it continues to bring, to her understanding of what it might mean to be an artist, and more specifically, a painter.

Lisa Adams creates images that are often unsettling, sometimes melancholy or by turns uplifting, but always affecting and richly atmospheric. The scale on which she works affords her involved and tightly realised paintings an intimacy that echoes the personal nature of so much of the subject matter. Indeed, she explores grand emotions on a humble scale so that the very act of looking at her paintings is a revelatory and ultimately rewarding experience. Adams' emblematic paintings hold the promise of divested secrets and play with constructions of language through the incorporation of witty titles.

Lisa Adams' larger *oeuvre* is characterised by the frequent return to self-portraiture. Her unflinching, introspective gaze has led to the creation of disarmingly honest and illuminating images that speak both about the artist's personal experience as well as the larger human condition. Adams' paintings speak about love and loss, success and failure and universal notions about the folly of human experience as seen from her unique perspective. Thus her own visage is a repeat motif, as is a range of subject matter, especially the landscape, which appears both as a backdrop for a narrative and as the subject itself.

Sometimes the landscape Adams depicts is Australian, connecting her to a larger grander art historical tradition of antipodean landscape painting. **Ghost Gum**, 2004 an exquisitely rendered work, is a meditation on the brutal degradation and decimation of the Australian bush, but functions also as a metaphorical evocation of loss. A lone gum stands bereft in a barren landscape, a magnificent specimen reduced to but a chimera, a ghostly incarnation of its former epic existence. The embodiment of the *idea* of nature, the tree is a cipher for the intangible emotions we accord the sublime, an emotional response traditionally associated to nature.

Similarly **Ghost Train** extends this metaphor, asking us to further suspend our disbelief as an invisible

steam train moves through a non-specific landscape, leaving in its wake a plume of smoke that speaks about presence in the face of an absence; is it a mirage or a natural phenomenon? Adams' paintings frequently manipulate narrative and realist painting's 'truthful' aesthetic to great effect. Importantly, this magical aspect of Adams' work sets her practice apart from many painters, and asks us to imagine the possibilities not only for painting but also for imagery more generally.

Native birds form a part of the artist's daily life in her home in Cooroy, north of Brisbane and appear frequently as subject matter. **Laughing jackass** depicts that most famous of Australian icons, the kookaburra, known and loved for its ebullient, mocking cackle. In contrast with this widely held stereotypical view, Adams' kookaburra is an embodiment of humility, inconsolable, brought down to earth as though cowed by melancholy. The image is full of sadness and a silence that again is at odds with the bird's inherent character and points to the palpable quietude that imbues Adams' painting practice.

In Adams' pictorial universe nature is full of portent; storms clouds roll menacingly in, an unnatural dust storm menaces a fearful kangaroo, a fog creeps insidiously and inclusively around two lovers, oblivious in their passionate embrace. In **Thin Ice**, 2004 (a sequel to **Lovers**, 2002), the erratic dips and valleys of Adams' partner's ECG recorded after a suspected heart attack appears on the ice in the midst of the incisions left by recreational skaters. The pervading chill of the bleak landscape, the ice bound lake and the lone croft of barren wintry trees in the distance, heightens the tension. The uncomfortable realisation of our own human frailty is brought to the fore in a painting of extraordinary stillness. A testament to love and mortality, **Thin Ice** is something of a contemporary version of traditional *memento mori*.

Adams herself is often to be found at the heart of these charged scenarios, the protagonist of her own dramatic making. In **Side-saddle**, 2004 the artist sits astride a gigantic tortoise, rigid in her singular determination as a realist painter whose practice involves the investment of an enormous amount of time. Literally forced to move slowly in the pursuit of her practice, Adams continues to make compelling painted stories that benefit from an attitude of slowness in their retelling.

Alison Kubler  
Curator, Public Programmes  
QUT Art Museum

*You are invited to the exhibition opening and drinks with the artist,  
6–8pm Friday, 1st October, 2004*



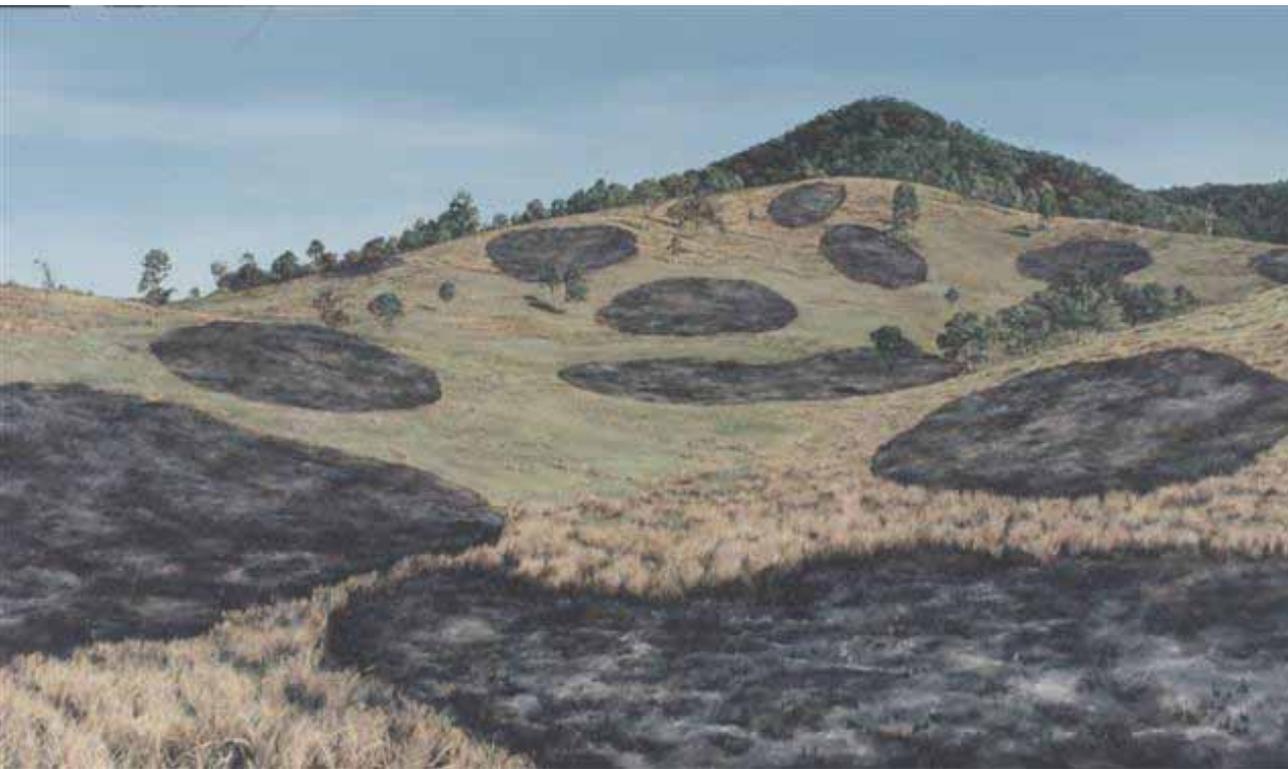
*cover* **Side-saddle** 2004  
oil on canvas 47.5x 71cm

*above* **The fleeing kangaroo**  
oil on canvas 86x121cm



*top* **Ghost gum** 2003  
oil on canvas 66x106 cm

*bottom* **The laughing jackass** 2001  
oil on canvas 58.5x94.5cm



*top* **Spotfires** 2002  
oil on canvas 91.5x153.5 cm

*bottom* **Ghost Train** 2004  
oil on canvas 29x50 cm

#### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

- 1969 Born Adelaide, South Australia  
Lives in Cooroy, Queensland  
Self taught artist
- 1998–2001 Teaching art to people with psychiatric illnesses for Adult Mental Health
- 2002 Teaching art for Support Services, Noosa District State High School
- 2003 Art history/contemporary art study tour through Italy, Switzerland, Germany, France and Spain  
Teaching art to marginalized/disabled youth for the *Onsite* project

#### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2004 Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane
- 2000 Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane
- 1998 Noosa Regional Gallery, Noosa
- 1994 Noosa Fine Art Gallery, Noosa

#### GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2003 *People and Places*, Redland Art Gallery  
*Central Queensland Art Purchase*,  
Rockhampton Art Gallery  
*Sex and Sexuality*, Noosa Regional Gallery  
*Heat*, Noosa Regional Gallery
- 2001 *Conrad Jupiters Art Prize*, Gold Coast City Art Gallery  
*Ready, set ... go!*, Global Arts Link
- 2000–2001 *Skin Deep*, Pataka Poiriroa Arts and Culture Centre, Wellington, NZ  
Cooloolo Shire Public Gallery  
Noosa Regional Gallery;  
Sunshine Coast University Gallery
- 1998 *Conrad Jupiters Art Prize*, Gold Coast City Art Gallery  
*Luscious*, Cooloolo Shire Public Gallery
- 1995 *Direct Sun*, Noosa Regional Gallery
- 1994 *Breton's Beach*, Noosa Regional Gallery
- 1991 *One*, Niagara Galleries, Melbourne  
*10th Anniversary*, Noosa Regional Gallery  
*The Surreal Mind*, Noosa Regional Gallery
- 1989 *Selected Survey*, Noosa Regional Gallery

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2003 Louise Martin-Chew, *The Artists*, Artink, volume 23, no. 2
- 2002 Douglas Heck and Burrell, 2002 Calendar
- 1999 Rex Butler, *Lisa Adams—Paintings* catalogue
- 1998 Sally Price, *Double Take*, Noosa Blue, Spring edition  
Lynne Seear, *Fantastical realism and the big questions—paintings by Lisa Adams* Noosa Regional Gallery exhibition catalogue
- 1996 *Artworker*, Spring edition (cover image)
- 1994 Renay Bone, *Generation X*, Noosa Blue, Summer edition  
*Boardwalk*, Summer edition (cover image)  
Francis Flynn, *The life dreams of painter Lisa Adams*, Boardwalk, Summer edition

#### AWARDS AND GRANTS

- 1997 Regional Arts Development Fund,  
Project Grant

#### COLLECTIONS

- Rockhampton Art Gallery  
Noosa Council  
Beautree Pty Ltd, Sydney  
Private collections



**Thinking** 2004  
oil on canvas 42.5x34.5cm



*top* **Track** 1999  
oil on canvas 64 x75.5cm

*bottom* **Thin ice** 2004  
oil on canvas 46 x81.5cm



Self portrait 1997  
oil on canvas 59.5x87cm

Exhibition current: 28 September to 23 October, 2004

30 YEARS  1974-2004

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