

LISA ADAMS



All through the dark, the wind looks for the grief it belongs to.

W. S. Merwin, *Night Wind*

I first encountered the paintings of Lisa Adams in 1997, when she asked me to write for her inaugural solo exhibition. She was very young, prodigiously talented and had secured a survey show (at Noosa Regional Gallery) at an early stage of what had been up to then a quite private career. Since that time, Lisa has won art prizes and the rapt attention of the contemporary art world, made the regulation pilgrimage to the great art museums of Europe and has quietly and steadily gained a reputation as an outstanding representational painter working in a mode which is best compared to the late twentieth-century literary genre of magic realism.

Adams's paintings are densely imagistic, dream-like, and full of awe for the natural world, though the landscape remains emblematic and personal. Her gaze is as steady and true as her technique, realised through detailed research of all the elements she wishes to bring into the work and through the use of photographic studies. Take the painting recently acquired for the collection of the Queensland Art Gallery, *Rose garden*, 2008. Based in part on a photograph taken by her partner as the artist climbed a wooden electrician's ladder sourced specifically for the work, it revisits an earlier painting, *Ladder* 1990–91, in which the artist ascends a ladder bound seemingly for heaven; its bottom rungs have been replaced by an incredible mass of snakes (all known Australian species), writhing, inter-twined and ready to strike. The reference which immediately comes to mind is the childhood board game 'Snakes and Ladders', that harmless past-time which introduces us to the inevitability of life's ups and downs. According to the artist, however, this game was only a marginal source for the painting, a raw interpretation of precariousness, curiosity and struggle. In this work each painted snake was presented with excruciating accuracy, rendered with the scientific sensibility one might find in a naturalist's manual. Even the parts hidden from view by the great, snaky mass, exist within the surface of the painting. The artist knows they are there, and the viewer feels it. *Rose garden* exerts a similar fetishistic commitment to truthful rendering and comes from the artist's realisation that as she grows older her thoughts and experiences have accumulated, as have the thorns on the ladder. The painting is about being determined to advance regardless; about meeting challenges head on. It was an ideal inclusion for the Gallery's summer blockbuster, 'Contemporary Australia: Optimism', which dealt with the courage it takes to live and work in the world:

My paintings never come easily and always have autobiographical significance. My painting style is painstaking and exacting and after years of painting every day all day, I've come to realize the endurance required to keep on going, come what may. Most wouldn't be aware of the physical pain that comes with sitting, 'triple zero' brush in hand, for years on end or the single minded determination to endure such isolation, but I love it and don't wish to sound "tortured". I do most of my talking through my painted images, when painting this particular work all these things are being talked about.

Lisa Adams's paintings, described by academic Rex Butler as 'small miracles', often bear a surreal quality but they also recall much older and more poignant traditions of illustrated proverbs and folk tales. In this exhibition we see her whispering secrets into trees. I used to tell my children that legend – how they could find a tree, carve a hole in it, whisper their secret, cover it up with mud and the tree would keep it safe. I wonder at the secrets Lisa has whispered into these paintings, locking them in with pigment, sealing them with her breath.

Lynne Seear

Deputy Director, Curatorial and Collection Development
Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art

YOU ARE INVITED
to the EXHIBITION OPENING *and*
DRINKS *with the* ARTIST
6–8pm FRIDAY, 26th JUNE 2009



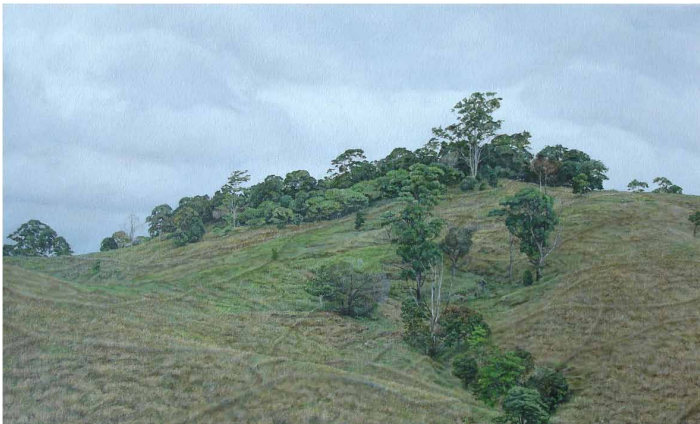
cover: 3. *Secret* 2009
OIL ON CANVAS 62 x 81 cm

above: 2. *Twister* 2009
OIL ON CANVAS 62 x 88 cm



top: 7. *Windy day* 2008
OIL ON CANVAS 41 × 68 cm

bottom: 8. *Sea study* 2008
OIL ON CANVAS 41 × 68 cm



top: 5. *Dead tree* 2008
OIL ON CANVAS 62 × 80 cm
bottom: 11. *Pulse* 2006
OIL ON CANVAS 31 × 52 cm

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

- 1969 Born Adelaide, South Australia
1998–2005 Teaching art for Queensland Adult Mental Health; Support Services, Noosa District State High School, Queensland and the onSITE project for marginalized/disabled youth

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2009 Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane
2004 Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane
2000 Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane
1998 Noosa Regional Gallery, Queensland
1994 Noosa Fine Art Gallery, Queensland

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2008–09 *Contemporary Australia: Optimism*, Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane
2008 *Tattersall's Club Landscape Art Prize* (winner), Brisbane
2004 *Flesh*, works from the Alex Mackay Collection of Erotic Art toured by Noosa Regional Gallery, Qld
2003 *People and Places*, Redland Art Gallery, Qld
Central Queensland Art Purchase, Rockhampton Art Gallery, Qld
Sex & Sexuality, Noosa Regional Gallery, Qld
Heat, Noosa Regional Gallery, Qld
2001 *Ready, set... go!*, Global Arts Link, Qld
Conrad Jupiters Art Prize (finalist), Gold Coast City Art Gallery, Qld
2000–2001 *Skin Deep*, Pataka Poiriroa Arts and Culture Centre, Wellington, NZ
Cooloola Shire Public Gallery, Qld
Noosa Regional Gallery, Qld
Sunshine Coast University Gallery, Qld
1998 *Conrad Jupiters Art Prize* (finalist), Gold Coast City Art Gallery, Qld
Luscious, Cooloola Shire Public Gallery, Qld
1995 *Direct Sun*, Noosa Regional Gallery, Qld
1994 *Breton's Beach*, Noosa Regional Gallery, Qld
1991 *One*, Niagara Galleries, Melbourne
10th Anniversary, Noosa Regional Gallery, Qld
The Surreal Mind, Noosa Regional Gallery, Qld
1989 *Selected Survey*, Noosa Regional Gallery, Qld

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2009 Ingrid Periz, 'Lisa Adams: Outside In', *Australian Art Collector*, issue 48 April–June
2008 Julie Ewington, *Contemporary Australia: Optimism*, exhibition catalogue, Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane
2006 Painting 'Maze' featured in Bernard Fanning video for track *Songbird*
2004 Alison Kubler, 'Lisa Adams, Paintings' exhibition catalogue, Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane, Oct
2004 Sandra McLean, 'Different Destination', *The Courier-Mail*, Oct. 8

- 2003 Louise Martin-Chew, 'The artists', *Artink*, volume 23, no. 2
2002 Douglas Heck and Burrell, calendar
2000 Louise Martin-Chew, 'Obscured as much as revealed', *The Australian*, Aug. 11
1999 Rex Butler, *Lisa Adams, Paintings*, exhibition catalogue, July
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

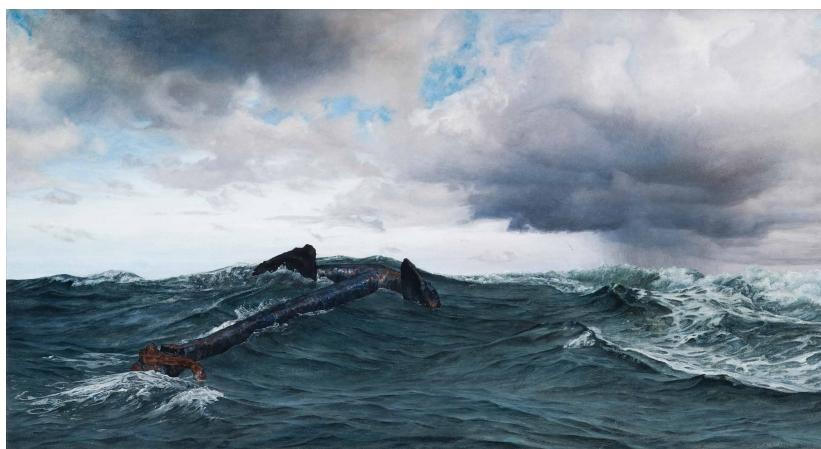
- 2008 Winner, *Tattersall's Club Landscape Art Prize*
2006 Shortlisted, 'RIPE' *Art and Australia and ANZ Bank Contemporary Art Award*
1997 Regional Arts Development Fund, Project Grant

COLLECTIONS

- Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art
QUT Art Museum, Brisbane
Tattersall's Club, Brisbane
Jeffrey Archer Collection, London
Rockhampton Art Gallery, Qld
Noosa Shire Council
Beautree Pty Ltd Sydney
Private collections



10. *Study for 'Rose garden'* 2007
OIL ON CANVAS 35 × 49 cm



top: 4. *Frozen sea* 2007
OIL ON CANVAS 54 × 92 cm

bottom: 9. *Drift* 2008
OIL ON CANVAS 33 × 61 cm



1. *Divining* 2007
OIL ON CANVAS 60 x 95 cm

EXHIBITION CURRENT: 23 JUNE TO 18 JULY 2009



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