LANDSCAPE OF LONGING: SHOREHAM 1950–2012

HAL HATTAM
KATHERINE HATTAM
WILLIAM MACKINNON

MORNINGTON PENINSULA REGIONAL ART GALLERY
27 FEBRUARY - 21 APRIL 2013

EXHIBITION PREVIEW
Statement

Over sixty-two years, three generations have looked at and made paintings of landscape – paintings of places outside and away from their urban lives. Paradoxically, what we see in this exhibition is not just three takes on a place that is there, but more than that. We have three self-portraits – as each artist constructs images where their internal psychological worlds merge with a particular external world. It’s as if everyone is in their own film or as Mad Men’s Don Draper says: ‘When a man enters a room he brings his whole life with him.’ Each artist has in fact looked closely at actual places apart from those in their heads.

Hal Hattam, after painting with Fred Williams, Charles Blackman and John Perceval in the 1950s, found his own voice in the 1970s, creating distinctive minimal images of the beach: Shoreham, Flinders, Point Leo. His focus is on the liminal, the line where sand meets sea, sea meets sky. Interestingly, although Shoreham Beach looks out to Phillip Island, the Nobbies and Seal Rocks, he depicted it as a clean masking-taped line, deleting any surplus land mass.

In contrast, in Katherine Hattam’s The Pines, sea and sky seen through pine trees merge with and are viewed both over a table and within walls crowded with psychologically loaded objects. There’s no such thing as pure landscape because every day we project onto what’s outside in front of us that which is going on inside our heads: memory, mood and life experience.

For William Mackinnon it’s an in-between non-place: the excitement and apprehension of getting away, leaving one place and taking the road somewhere else. Clear, beautifully painted, Mackinnon’s apparently realistic depictions of the East Link Tunnel, the view over Arthur’s Seat or through pines to the creek and beyond at Shoreham Beach, are in fact constructions. He gives dramatic material form to an in-between psychological experience, that of the road - that space in between places.

‘Landscape of Longing’ is an exhibition of three generations, significantly a father and a daughter, a mother and a son – identification, inspiration in both instances has been a competition across the sexes. The title of the exhibition originates in Gallery Director, Patrick McCaughey’s essay for an exhibition of Hal Hattam’s paintings at Heide Museum of Modern Art in 2003. This is a landscape show … or is it? For each artist the interest lies in making a painting rather than depicting a view.

Perhaps what we see here is an argument about the possibility of making a landscape painting per se.

Katherine Hattam and William Mackinnon, 2013
Hal HATTAM

*Surfer – Green Wave*  1972-73  
83 x 102 cm  
$9000

Hal Hattam often sat working on Shoreham Beach, drawing the surfers and their boards. Here there is a sense of the ‘givenness of the world’, the contemporary figure of the board surfer set into the sand dunes. By the early 1970s he knew artists Dale Hickey, Robert Jacks, Paul Partos, Robert Hunter and their work well. This painting reflects that engagement with the more abstract and minimal approach of the time combined with his observation and love of a particular place.

This image of a young surfer, merging into the sand dunes embodies the beach iconography of freedom - as the Melbourne poet Chris Wallace-Crabbe perceptively observed, his beach paintings ‘bespeak the struggle to escape from … to make himself ‘an inhabitant of that margin, the sea’s fringe’.

In this painting, on a small scale, Hal Hattam treated the canvas as a field, as he did on a much larger scale in works such as *Middle Beach*.

KH, 2013
Though Hal Hattam spent days and years looking out from both Shoreham Beach and what we called Middle Beach at the horizon where Phillip Island, Seal Rocks and the Nobbies were more or less visible, he has here willfully deleted that landmass in order to achieve an uninterrupted vista.

Art historian Patrick McCaughey in his 2003 essay *Hal Hattam and the Landscape of Longing* argues that ‘Hattam’s Shoreham beachscapes mark some of the most fetching and vivid representations of this distinctively Australian theme’ and sees him as sharing with Nolan ‘a beach iconography of freedom’.

For McCaughey: ‘there is a release into matchless solitariness, for the beach of these paintings is undisturbed by any human presence. the sand is untrodden. The beach occupies virtually the entire canvas; it absorbs the total consciousness of the painter and the viewer, in turn.’

KH, 2013
A painting of a spot on the cliff, near the camping ground at Shoreham seen from the beach sand.

Much of the path no longer exists but the steps cut into the rock at the base remain. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s monks in retreat could be seen standing at the top of the stairs contemplating the view. This was a shortcut back from the beach. It was a place of contemplation connecting with my father’s ‘unending search for that perfect shoreline, that play and interplay, that half-remembered, half-imagined place in between,’ as former Lecturer in Politics at Melbourne University, Dr Graham Little, once wrote.

Unusually, the perspective is back up into the scrubby cliff and the horizon line follows the irregular topography whereas in most of his beachscapes the viewer looks out to sea.
Hal HATTAM

*Monks’ Lookout*  1970s

56 x 76cm

$5000

The gouaches were usually painted on the spot to work from later in the studio as raw material for an oil painting. They have the freshness of direct observation. Hattam only ever had one exhibition of gouaches – those of the Westgate Bridge at Tate Adams Gallery in Crossley Lane Melbourne, though he made several hundred over thirty years. It is unlikely this work was ever exhibited.
Away in a grassy paddock there still sits this abandoned hut. We made several family trips to this hut. I now see it as a place for contemplation, for thinking. This gouache, painted on the spot, certainly conveys this quality. It has the freshness which comes with direct observation, sitting in the landscape with his specially designed board with gouache en plein air.

Gouache has the advantages of opacity and its capacity for impasto combined with being extremely quick drying and forgiving. McCaughey, in his essay for the Hal Hattam exhibition at Heide Museum of Modern Art quotes poet and critic Chris Wallace-Crabbe observing a struggle within Hal Hattam to escape from a medical life, striving towards Bachelard’s ‘World of Reverie’. The hut could be seen as representing a place for that reverie.

KH, 2013
KATHERINE HATTAM

Stream of consciousness or Know your own IQ  – Shoreham  2012
130 x 165
$8800

Literature has been a continuing interest for me and this work was originally entitled Stream of Consciousness. Making these works where the interior and external worlds merge into one another, Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse is an influence. The landscape here is that moment, the first glimpse of the sea up ahead. I chose to lay down a grid from the recycled pages of a 1970s non-fiction psychology book. This was a time when people did IQ tests and knew their own IQ. School and university holidays were spent studying such texts. The wallpaper down the side of the window in this work refers to that in Sidney Nolan's Kelly paintings. Descending the walls are the clock and several paintings: a Fred Williams landscape, a Louise Bourgeois mother and child. On the table, domestic essentials such as a coffee pot, tomato sauce along with two different sorts of brushes, both reading and sun glasses, a camera, a mobile phone. The car sits awkwardly between the inside and outside worlds. I list these with interest as while making the picture I relied on intuition and, to some extent, see the meaning only after the fact.
KATHERINE HATTAM
*At the Beach* 2012
80 x 180cm
$9,900

From a photograph taken one hot evening at Shoreham, one in which no-one is known to me – there’s an element of anonymity. Yet I was moved, looking at the photograph, seeing each figure taking up archetypal beach poses: one standing in the shallows, another floating on his/her back, yet another flicking hair back in a classic Australian gesture.

The process of photography and digital inscription and then printmaking enables me to enact the emotional inscription of a landscape that I know well.
KATHERINE HATTAM

The Pines  2012-13
130 x 170cm
$16,000

Characteristically, we look across a table past cups and coffee pot, glasses, phone, ceramics, camera – a mixture of the mundane things of domestic and professional life – a snakes and ladders game sits between two clocks where real time is not the same as psychological time. The process involves a mixture of drawing, photography, printmaking and painting, chance or control. The act of inscription is as if making the work mimics the fact of both the interior and outside worlds having been inscribed onto my memory. Looking at the very Japonisme-like Shoreham pine trees in this block I see the images of Hokusai and Hiroshige that I have returned to again and again in a book I bought in 1982, called Japonisme by Siegfried Weichmann. The book explores the Japanese influence on Western Art – though I wasn’t consciously striving for the Japanese look, I had no hesitation in fastening on to it when it appeared.

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KATHERINE HATTAM  
*Real Time/Psychological Time* 2013  
60 X 80 CM  
$6000

A snakes and ladders board that is both a childhood game played on holiday and an image that can stand in for life, its successes and failures. The clocks show different times – daily time in the real world and emotional psychological time, suggesting the fact that the past can reappear in the present. These three objects hang on a wall, at the edge of this wall sits a dark landscape viewed through rough trees that in fact exist above Shoreham Beach but could be stolen from a Japanese print. This block was deemed a failure which enabled me to risk rolling it up in black, thus opening a whole new approach for me – no colour. Its roughness also made it resistant to the ink and increasing my sense of life being inscribed onto it as that landscape has been to my memory.
KATHERINE HATTAM  
*Monks’ Lookout*  2012  
100 x 80 cm  
$7000

Seeing my father’s painting *Steps* (1970s) and his gouache *Monks’ Lookout*, an image of the armchair he used to sit in seems to encapsulate him and to obliterate the more literal landscape of the steps cut into the cliff by the monks enabling access to a deserted beach. The finished work only has an abbreviated landscape at the top of the picture while down the sides an inventory of objects signal the emotions, time …

The memory from which this image came is of my father’s fear – quite rational fear coming out of a simple, pleasurable event. One afternoon, giving my mother a break presumably, he took me and my two sisters, three small children under six, on a walk around the bays, past the monks’ lookout steps and three large rocks thrusting out of the sand. On our way back he saw that he had misjudged the tide which was crashing on the rocks. He carried us one at a time on his shoulders through the waves, leaving the others behind on either side of the headland. Almost sixty years later I recall his fear and anxiety. Yet now it all looks small and harmless.
KATHERINE HATTAM
Green Monks’ Lookout  2013
47 x 67cm
$4000

Called Green Monks’ Lookout because it is all different greens – it’s the spot with the steps and the rocks and the tide and a story.

The abstract pattern at the top and bottom are patterned windows and a floor of my sister’s house in Brooklyn NY. She was there that day at Monk’s Lookout when the tide came in – but also I simply needed an abstract element in a purely formal way. The sketches of assemblages by Jean Arp, Nolan’s Boy in the Moon also play with notions of abstraction, as does the indigenous woven bag. TLouise Bourgeois figure represents a mother, a pregnant woman – these are all significant aspects yet making the painting was driven by wishing to use as many different greens as I could lay my hands on.
KATHERINE HATTAM
Recharging  2013.
60 x 120cm
$7000

The American artist Eva Hesse once remarked that ‘the desire comes first’ – this make sense to me, as I first want to depict something only realising why afterwards. As writer and sub-editor of Un magazine, Harriet Morgan, wrote in her essay, Desire and the Impossible, ‘my work cannot escape the concept of family. This is clear even in ostensibly landscape paintings. Here the bush and cliff coming down to meet the rocks and sand is the central image but modified and contained and contaminated by an interior. The domestic is there as an interior in the mind and the two clocks (one digital, the other analogue) suggest both themselves the digital and analogue realities and the psychological fact that the past can burst into the present. The process of making this work involves a mixture of drawing, photography, printmaking and painting – chance and control.
I see this image as a poem, something compressed – the strange head-shaped rock reminds me of my father. It also recalls the frightening time when the tide came in. The Hut is the shack of our holidays – compressed they sum up for me my father, his work in this exhibition and how landscape is always more than landscape – a sort of self-portrait.
WILLIAM MACKINNON

Arriving  2013
61 x 91cm
$4250

‘The Road has become a key subject for Mackinnon, and has been a constant in his life since childhood when he began to travel regularly between respective homes of his parents who lived in Melbourne and western Victoria. During 2009-10, driving hundreds of kilometres between small desert communities was a major part of his employment as a Field Officer at Papunya Tula in Central Australia. The road is a powerful motif that symbolizes adventure, escape and the anticipation of arrival.’

Joanna Bosse, Curator, Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne
In my paintings episodes from different times are conflated. This painting began from the memory of a view when I drove back after a weekend away and I got lost, and went the wrong way and stumbled across this striking view of Arthur’s Seat. I returned to find it years later, and the highway had been extended, I sat on the side of the road drawing, recording colours too subtle for the camera to detect. We then drove up where I had been drawing, and got this amazing view of the lights below, through the trees. The resulting painting synthesizes these different experiences and I have introduced a bridge, and a truck and a fictitious Exit.

It was a difficult time in my life where I thought about an exit. In a way the roads are always something more, something symbolic. Bridges, exits, dips, darkness and lights are stand in for emotional states, or are symbolic of greater themes in life. In a way I am trying to use things from around me, from my life, our culture to develop a shared language to say something larger and more profound.
At the time I made these paintings I was going through a difficult and uncertain time. These are very subjective views. I want to draw attention that it is a landscape seen from a mind. Looking through the filter of their mind. That is why I have emphasised the windscreen. And the rear-vision mirror. The lights in the reflection are humanized, lonely, fragile. There is a person there to, but I have created a symbol which merges the person with the car.

‘The unpopulated landscapes give a sense of the artist’s preoccupation with interior states, with achingly quiet nightscapes and solitary cars. Broad expanses of highway convey a sense of the lonely nature of an artist’s journey’.

Joanna Bosse, Curator, Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne
WILLIAM MACKINNON

200 x 360cm
$18,000

‘I later learnt that when I saw more of Mackinnon's work, that pathos is a consistent feature of both his paintings and his prints, and that while it is hard to pin down, it is this emotive quality that defines his work.’
Joanna Bosse, Curator, Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne

I think in the scale, surface the handling of the paint the influence of Tim Maguire is evident. I spent 3 formative years as Maguire’s studio assistant in London and France where I learnt a huge amount.
'It’s important to mention this feeling of anticipation, as there is a powerful sense of longing for something beyond what is depicted that is present in many of Mackinnon’s works. The frequent use inclusion of the horizon and the curve of the road ahead in the driving paintings and the mysterious light that seeps through alludes to an indefinable but life-affirming force just out of reach.'

Joanna Bosse, Curator, Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne
‘Since Mackinnon’s first solo exhibition in 1996, Bush, he has explored the capacity of the landscape to act as an emotional register. From early 2009, he has increasingly moved away from the imagined dreamscapes produced during his Masters studies. These 2008-9 works appear like stage-sets, where the picture plane functions like a collage with related and disparate motifs shifting in scale and painterly treatment. Dripped, sprayed and flicked acrylic and enamel paint is combined with collage and glitter, displaying the artist’s enjoyment of exploring the possibilities and limitations of the painting medium.’

Joanna Bosse, Curator, Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne
I am interested in how what we see in the world is affected by what is going on in our minds. There is no such thing as a pure landscape, we project ourselves into the world.
'If anything terrible happened in my life, this is the place I would like to go. This is an exhibition about that sort of place in our lives' (Hattam, K. 2013)

Landscape of longing draws together an impressive array of new and rarely seen paintings and drawings by three generations of artists from one Melbourne family – Hal Hattam, Katherine Hattam and William Mackinnon. Produced in response to their rambling house and beach holidays at the small coastal hamlet of Shoreham, each of the artists have revisited, photographed, drawn, painted and pondered this idyllic setting over a sixty two year span.

This timely exhibition highlights the complexities and significance of the Australian beach getaway and family retreats. For Hal Hattam the pristine empty sand and blue green water of Western Port intimates 'a landscape of longing', while for Katherine Hattam the beach is never purely a landscape but a site inflected by an inside psychological world. For William Mackinnon the road represents that transitional space of getting to and from this special place. What is shared is the significance of the psyche of a ‘somewhere’ away from and unlike everyday normal work and social life: the holiday place where you do what it is you really want to do.

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