

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP A NEW WORLD BEGINS

City deaths: Melbourne's tragic day

Weekend Newspaper of the Year

AFR WEEKEND

The Australian Financial Review www.afr.com | 21-22 January 2017 \$4 INC GST



SPECIAL READER OFFER

As Australia Day approaches, *AFR Weekend* in association with The Store is celebrating a rising Australian artist, James Drinkwater. The Newcastle-based painter is making a splash in the art world, and we are very proud to offer readers three limited edition prints.

Inside today's wrap

■ **Window to a happy place**
Meet the artist following in the footsteps of Australia's landscape giants. By *John McDonald*.

■ **Behind the art**
The stories behind the paintings. By *James Drinkwater*.

■ **How to own**
Full details on how to purchase our three limited edition prints.

The Last Light

To own a signed limited edition giclee print of this work, or a choice of two others from this collection, go to thestore.com.au/drinkwater

ARTIST PHOTO: PETER BRAIG

AFRGA1 S001

WINDOW TO A HAPPY PLACE

Art Emerging Australian painter James Drinkwater loves to fill his work with vitality and energy, writes John McDonald.



James Drinkwater in his studio in Newcastle. His work traverses painting, sculpture, assemblage and collage. PHOTOS: PETER BRAIG



If an advertising agency set out to design a new generation Australian painter who combined all the most attractive aspects of his predecessors, the result would be James Drinkwater. Still in his early 30s, Drinkwater has impressed everyone with his energy, ambition and work ethic. In conversation he is polite, sensitive and full of enthusiasm. His contemporaneity is rounded off with a few discreet tats and a beard slightly too unkempt to qualify him as a grade-A hipster.

A Newcastle boy, like John Olsen and William Dobell, Drinkwater has been drawing and painting for as long as he can remember. He claims to have begun at the age of five, when he became fascinated by the

small landscapes his auntie would paint in the kitchen. Tearing around the house with a gang of cousins, young James was stopped in his tracks by a first whiff of paint.

At the age of 10 Drinkwater borrowed a documentary on Fred Williams from the library, and watched it over and over, until his mother wondered if there was something wrong with him.

Between the ages of 10 and 18 he would attend Ron Hartree's art school in Newcastle, going to life drawing classes every Tuesday and Thursday nights. By the time Drinkwater was ready to move to Sydney to enroll at the National Art School, he had

already spent almost half his life in drawing classes. "Drawing is a lesson in learning how to see," he says. "It underpins everything I do."

After graduating from the NAS, Drinkwater moved to Melbourne, where he met his wife-to-be, Lottie Consalvo, a painter and performance artist. Feeling the need to broaden their horizons, the two young artists left for Berlin, where they spent three years learning their trade and soaking up the atmosphere. In a small flat in Neukölln, Drinkwater painted in the bedroom while Consalvo painted in the lounge room, sometimes seven days a week.

A three-month residency in Leipzig provided the finishing touches, allowing first-hand experience of one of Europe's most dynamic contemporary art scenes. The

star of the Leipzig school is Neo Rauch, whose studio was directly above that of Drinkwater and Consalvo. It was hardly a lesson in the Bohemian lifestyle, as they watched him arrive for work in a yellow Ferrari.

From Germany, Drinkwater and Consalvo visited Kenya before returning to Australia, more specifically to Newcastle, where they could live more cheaply than in Sydney or Melbourne. In 2014, soon after their first child, Vincenzo, was born, Drinkwater won the Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship, which took the family back to Europe, this time for three months at the Cité des Arts in Paris, and three months travelling, from Ireland to the Balkans.

What I love about the Australian landscape is that it's disorderly, it's prickly and tough.

James Drinkwater

In Paris they found themselves close to the Louvre, the Musée d'Orsay and Monet's great water lilies in the Orangerie.

Having secured a show with London dealer Peta O'Brien, Drinkwater invested in good-quality materials and plunged into his work. It was the opposite approach to that of most Australian artists, who tend to stay for a time in the Cité des Arts, making small sketches and taking photos, hardly daring to produce work of any size that would need to be shipped home.

With a haven back in Newcastle, Drinkwater began to reacquaint himself with the Australian landscape, travelling to the outback and to Tasmania in search of subject matter.

In this he was following in the footsteps of many earlier Australian painters (again, think of Dobell and Olsen, or even Tom Roberts), who came to maturity during years spent in Europe but found a new sense of exhilaration when they returned home.

"I think it was the space that I noticed most when we got back from overseas," Drinkwater recalls. "While it may have felt romantic to be carting coal on a trolley in Berlin to burn in a stove, it was a thrill to come back and find all that space around and between objects. And the sound of the birds! There's a clarity to life in this country that I really appreciate."

Drinkwater has obvious affinities with older artists such as Elisabeth Cummings and Ross Laurie, both landscape painters with a strong leaning towards abstraction. The idea is not to depict a scene with photographic precision but to re-invent it based on one's own observations and memories. No matter how many studies are painted in front of the motif, the bulk of the work will be done in the studio, as Drinkwater strives to recapture his impressions of a particular site.

Painter Fred Williams pointed out that in the Australian landscape there's no obvious focal point, which means an artist had to build such features into a painting. Drinkwater is quick to agree. "What I love about the Australian landscape is that it's disorderly, it's prickly and tough. In my paintings I want to capture that landscape from multiple perspectives. I want a sense of vitality and energy – that strong gesture."

Although his paintings may seem dauntingly abstract at first glance, Drinkwater recognises that in today's art world he could be viewed as old-fashioned. By his own admission, as a gestural painter he is "a bit of a dinosaur", but he loves paint too much to worry about whether he is in or out of fashion. What's important is the spirit of the picture rather than the medium.

"A lot of artists are responding to these terrible times with works full of terror and sadness," he says. "I'm doing the opposite – offering some respite." ■

John McDonald is senior art critic for the Sydney Morning Herald. He also writes on film for AFR Weekend.

Special reader offer

ABOUT THE ARTWORKS



■ THE LAST LIGHT (2016)

During a three-day winter visit to the Tasmanian highlands Drinkwater stayed in a pioneer's hut clad with bark torn from local gums. A ream of French paper kicked out across the forest floor, creating a strange map from the combination of ink, charcoal and earth. This and other drawings done during the visit became the foundation for a larger suite of works, including *Last Light*, which will be shown in Singapore in February. "It's always about place, although I like to blur that line between abstraction and figuration," says the artist.



■ THE HOT AND HEADY NIGHT (HORSES) (2015)

One evening during Drinkwater's time in central Australia, a pack of wild horses approached his bush camp about 400 kilometres west of Alice Springs. The spectacular desert sunset promised a storm, and the humidity and looming dark clouds kept the artists awake. At 3am they broke camp, escaping to the relative safety of the bush highway before the rain set in. "This painting is about our escape, reminding me that the country will always have power over us no matter how much we advance," Drinkwater says.

■ THE FINKE RIVER AND THE ROYAL MEETING (2015)

The Finke River and the Royal Meeting was inspired by Drinkwater's travels to central Australia, where he visited locations such as Glen Helen Gorge and Ormiston Creek. On the trip he read a biography of pioneering Indigenous artist Albert Namatjira and felt inspired by the story of this "wanderer between two worlds". Buried in the heavily abstracted forms of this painting is Namatjira's meeting with the young Queen Elizabeth, which took place at Government House in Canberra in 1954.



To own a signed limited edition giclee print of this work, or a choice of two others from this collection, go to thestore.com.au/drinkwater

SIGNED, LIMITED-EDITION GICLEE PRINTS

James Drinkwater

CELEBRATE AUSTRALIAN ART WITH A SPECIAL COLLECTION OF WORKS BY JAMES DRINKWATER

THE *Store*
BY FAIRFAX

Available only from thestore.com.au/drinkwater



JAMES DRINKWATER: THE ARTIST AT A GLANCE

- Australian painter
- Born 1983
- Lives and works in Newcastle, NSW
- Inspiration includes Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Georges Braque, Philip Guston, Georg Baselitz, Brett Whiteley and John Olsen
- Won the 2014 Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship
- Included in *Art Collector* magazine's "Fifty Things

- Collectors Need to Know 2017"
- Showing at the Australian High Commission in Singapore in February
- Represented by Nanda/Hobbs Contemporary, Sydney and NKN Gallery, Melbourne
- Features in the collections of Macquarie Bank, Artbank, Allens, Warner Music Australia and the Newcastle Art Gallery, among others



There's a clarity to life in this country that I really appreciate.
James Drinkwater