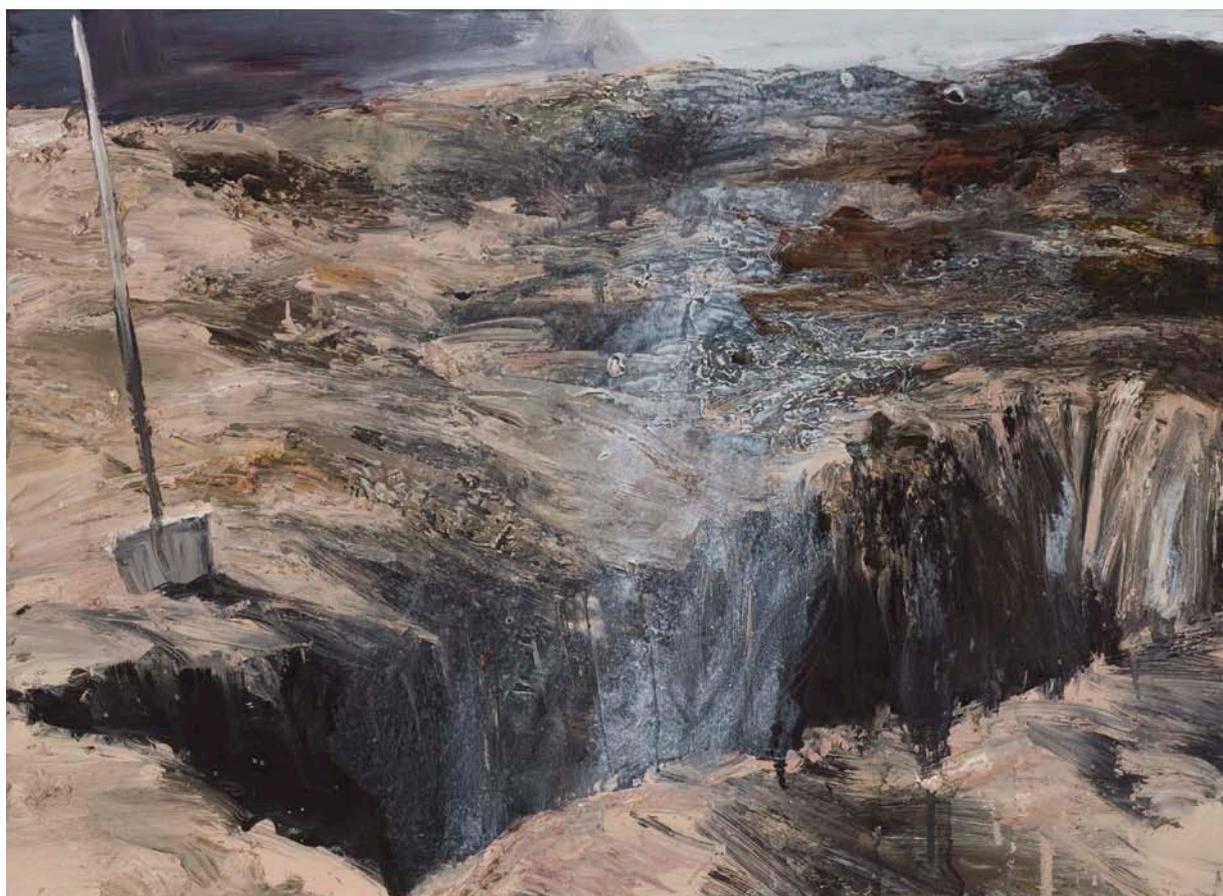




**TWEED RIVER  
ART GALLERY**  
MURWILLUMBAH

## ***Surface Tension: the art of Euan Macleod 1991 - 2009***

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A Tweed River Art Gallery touring exhibition, curated by Gavin Wilson



## **EDUCATION RESOURCE**

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Prepared by Kent Buchanan, Curator, Western Plains Cultural Centre

This exhibition is supported by Visions of Australia, an Australian Government program supporting touring exhibitions by providing funding assistance for the development and touring of Australian cultural material across Australia.



**Australian Government**  
**Visions of Australia**

## EDUCATION RESOURCE

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This resource provides biographical, analytical and art-historical information about and relating to the work of Euan Macleod for the exhibition *Surface Tension: the art of Euan Macleod 1991-2009*. The exhibition, curated by freelance curator Gavin Wilson for the Tweed River Art Gallery, presents a selection of paintings from various bodies of work, collected as a curatorial statement about the ongoing artistic practice of Euan Macleod.

The resource features activities / questions / discussion topics for the K-12 Visual Arts Curricula for New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.

The exhibition will tour to six venues throughout 2010 - 11.

S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney, NSW	12 November – 19 December 2010
Tweed River Art Gallery, Murwillumbah, NSW	28 January – 27 March 2011
Orange Regional Gallery, Orange, NSW	29 April – 12 June 2011
Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, Mornington, VIC	30 June – 7 August 2011
Newcastle Region Art Gallery, Newcastle, NSW	27 August – 16 October 2011
The University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane, QLD	29 October – 11 December 2011

The Resource also includes a blog ([www.srfctnsn.wordpress.com](http://www.srfctnsn.wordpress.com)), which is to be utilised by teachers and students as a portal for discussion about the practical and theoretical aspects of practice. The blog will contain additional information, images and links. Teachers and students are encouraged to engage with the blog, develop comments, feedback and discussion.

Education Resource prepared by Kent Buchanan, Curator Western Plains Cultural Centre, Dubbo

*Surface Tension: the art of Euan Macleod 1991 – 2009*  
A Tweed River Art Gallery touring exhibition, curated by Gavin Wilson.

Euan Macleod is represented by Watters Gallery, Sydney; Niagara Galleries, Melbourne and Victor Mace Fine Art Gallery, Brisbane.

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Cover image: Euan Macleod *Smoke/pink landscape/shovel* 2009 oil on canvas 84 x 120cm  
Gallipoli Memorial Club Ltd. Collection

## BIOGRAPHY

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### **Euan MACLEOD**

Born Christchurch, New Zealand, 1956

Lives and works in Sydney, Australia

Euan Macleod completed a Certificate in Graphic Design at Christchurch Technical Institute between 1974 and 1975 and a Diploma of Fine Arts (Painting) at the Canterbury University, Christchurch, from 1977 to 1979. He moved to Sydney in 1981 and has lived and worked in Sydney ever since. Macleod has consistently exhibited since 1980, having held his first solo exhibition in 1982 at Watters Gallery in Sydney.

Macleod's work is concerned with the natural landscape and human presence within it. His dense, textured and sculptural use of paint has become a consistent feature of his work. Many of his landscapes are not specifically Australian or that of New Zealand, but composites, further heightening their psychological impact.

His expressive style lends itself to simple yet potent compositions, his muted palette imbuing the works with rich symbolism and atmosphere. His use of colour has expanded in the last decade, with many works depicting the ochres and crimsons of the Australian desert. Macleod works mostly in the studio but has spent much time working en plein air, most recently in the Flinders Ranges of South Australia and Antarctica. Macleod works mainly in oils but has produced many works on paper, including drawings and artist's prints. His most recent exhibition at Watters Gallery featured work produced during and after time spent in Antarctica. These works present a shift in landscape but a continuation of the artist's themes and symbols.

Macleod has been the recipient of many prestigious awards such as the 1999 Archibald Prize, the 2001 Sulman Prize, the 2006 Blake Prize and most recently the 2009 Gallipoli Art Prize. His works are held in many public and private collections, including the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Saatchi & Saatchi, Wellington, New Zealand and Allen Allen & Hemsley, Sydney.



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Euan Macleod *Iceman cometh* 2009 oil on canvas 84 x 120cm Private Collection

## LAND AND SCAPE

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Australia has a rich tradition of art depicting the landscape and our complicated relationship to it. This theme has been extrapolated in painting, literature, cinema, drama et al, and goes to the heart of the post-colonial experience. The Australian psyche is influenced by the enormity of the continent and the extremes of its landscape. The great untamed interior (as opposed to the concentration of settlement on the coastal periphery) encouraged much exploratory endeavour. The fear of the interior inevitably brought with it our relationship with the first inhabitants whose knowledge and interaction with the environment was vastly superior to ours. The colonists' explorations of the landscape were driven by a desire to conquer this new frontier and to seek arable and productive land for the support and continued growth of the new colony. The colonists did not (in the most part) consider the Aboriginal experience, as previously the country had been deemed *terra nullius*. This ignorance became part of our complicated relationship to Australia's diverse terrain. Many early painters depicted Aboriginal people at the periphery, rather than at the centre of the composition.

Many early painters presented a European gaze – the rendering of an idealised view of an alien land. Unable to describe the interior, these artists saw distance as the only real way to describe what they saw, without the groundwork of understanding it from the inside (see picturesque, romantic, John Glover, S.T. Gill, Robert Hoddle, J.C. Armytage and Joseph Lycett). As the colony grew, so did the ways in which Australia was being depicted in art.

The changes in art via the exploration of and familiarity with the landscape, has resulted in a gradual change in the ways we view the landscape. Artists such as Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, George Lambert, Arthur Boyd, Albert Tucker and Russell Drysdale built on the foundations created by the early colonial artists, providing multifarious views of the environment.

Euan Macleod's work evokes a world in which the landscape is rich and abundant and human presence is minimal, save for the solitary human figure. The figure can be read as the artist himself, or as a symbolic representation of humanity. Macleod often includes elements such as fire and water, as well as objects such as boats and shovels which have personal significance to the artist. These elements also speak to the historical relationship of human interaction with the world, and our desire to conquer and tame our surroundings. His work ultimately resonates with a universal need to understand and belong to an environment.

The figures in Macleod's works are rendered simply and often without clothing, enveloped and overwhelmed by the natural environment around them. They can be seen walking through trees, beside lakes and rivers, in simple shelters and mineshafts, beside fires, pushing wheelbarrows and either carrying or sitting in boats. Macleod has depicted the figure as giant, using the landscape as the base for quiet contemplation. The influence of working en plein air has produced works that depict figures making and/or holding artworks. In 2008 Macleod visited the Flinders Ranges in South Australia with a group of artists. This resulted in work that presents the grandeur and complexity of the Australian landscape, coupled with intimate representations of the artist/s working within it – attempting to capture the enormity of the experience. More recently Macleod has visited the otherworldly

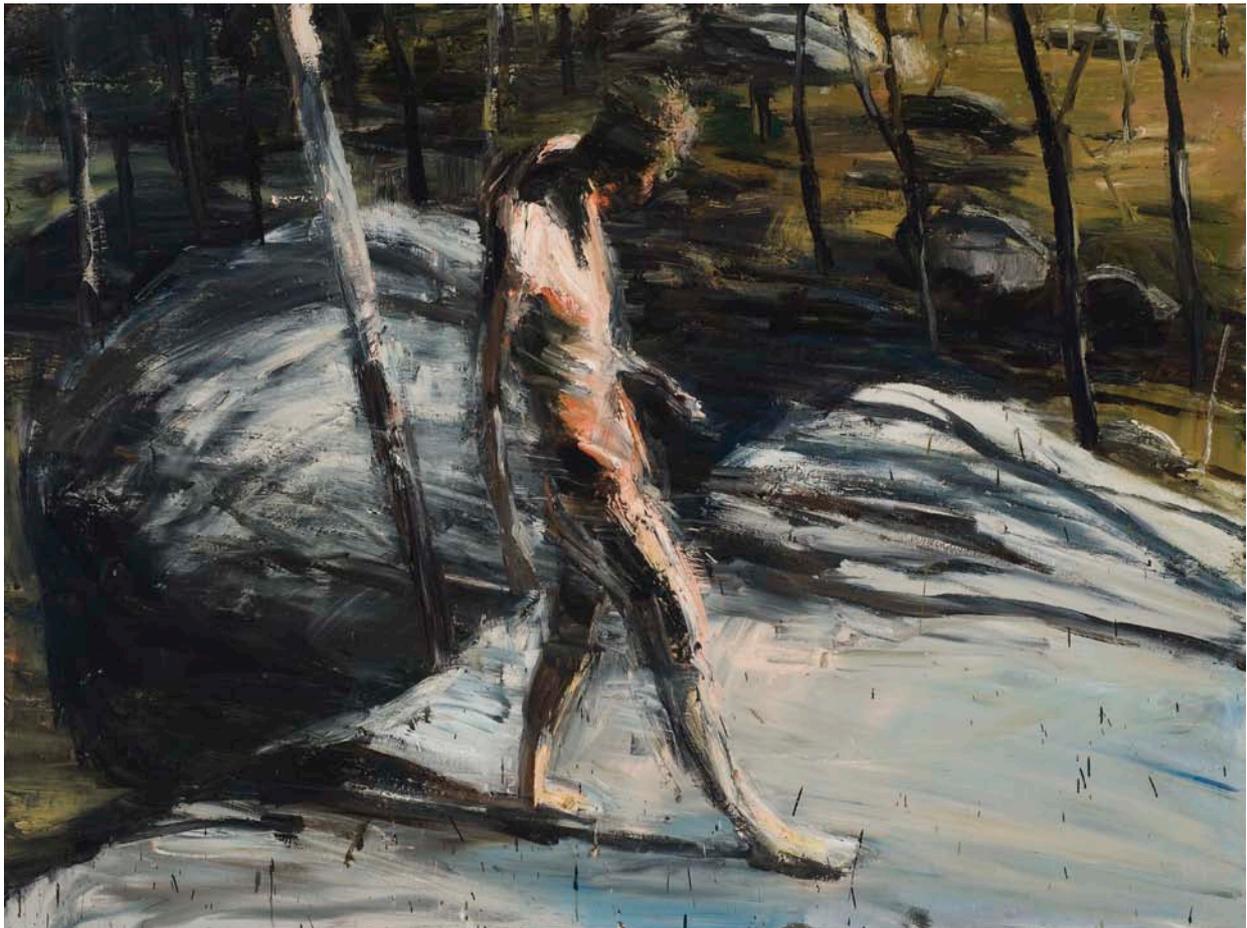
landscape of the Antarctic, producing bravura works in oils, as well as small studies in synthetic polymer paint that describe the journey to and from.

Macleod's paintings also present depictions of primordial virgin landforms, devoid of human presence or detritus, as if Gondwana had been freshly split apart to reveal lush chasms and ruptures.

He masterfully uses paint to communicate the macro experience, folding and intermingling colours on the micro surface. The land in Macleod's paintings can often feel dark and malevolent, yet the overall feeling is of a natural continuum.

The personal history and iconography present in the works provides the viewers with elements of the artist's biography, yet given the simplicity of the figures and objects, they remain universal in their effect.

Macleod takes us back to a time before colonial settlement of the land, when it was still free of the strictures of ownership and progress. He asks us to ponder the power of the environment around us and our own personal responses to it.



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Euan Macleod *Figure in Moonbi landscape* 1991 oil on canvas 138 x 183cm Collection of Tony Palmer

## AN INTERVIEW WITH EUAN MACLEOD

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Interview by Kent Buchanan with Euan Macleod via email September 2010.

**KB:** When were you conscious of wanting to draw / paint?

**EM:** I was conscious of drawing from as early as I can remember. I don't remember starting – it's something I always just did. It was my way of expressing myself. I was a very shy kid and could express myself by drawing my emotions. It was always a very physical process for me, a kind of fantasy life.

**KB:** What were your reference points at the time?

**EM:** A lot of my drawing I remember was about war and conflict, things that seemed to fascinate me as a kid. Funnily enough, the stuff I did then has a lot of connection to what I'm doing now – attempting to understand our place in the world.

**KB:** Which teacher/s influenced your practice?

**EM:** I never felt I had inspiring teachers till after I left high school. I never got all the formal lessons and generally art wasn't taken seriously; it was seen as a bit of a bludge. Then I did a graphic art course before art school and at both these I was exposed to actual serious artists and this showed me that art was a serious, all-encompassing endeavour - not just what they said, but what they did. Certainly this was what I found the most inspirational, but various teachers have had a huge impact on me.

**KB:** What is your view of art-making?

**EM:** I guess in a funny way I haven't changed that much since drawing as a young kid - that a huge part of my need to make paintings is a way of attempting to understand my internal world and to express it to whomever is interested. I keep hoping at some stage I'll mature and will find another reason to make art, but at the moment it does seem to remain a pretty selfish endeavour.

**KB:** What do you want to achieve with paint that you haven't already been able to achieve?

**EM:** I do love paint and what you can do with it, but there is a frustration with wanting to be able to do more. I get extremely frustrated with the physical limitations of oil paint (what tends to happen if it's not used properly) and sometimes I can push it too far, but ultimately it's what you do with the paint, not the paint itself that is of interest to me; the sense of transformation.

**KB:** Who do you imagine your audience to be?

**EM:** I think painting to a particular audience or specific group is a worry. When I'm in the studio I try not to think about who the work's for – whether this person or that person will like it, whether it will sell, but almost allow the work to determine its own form. Certainly I know (and this would be true for most artists) that some people like what you do and some people don't. I think it's best if your work gets a strong response, whether positive or negative, rather than indifference.

**KB:** What can painting do that other art-forms are unable to?

**EM:** I've always enjoyed the limitations of painting, working within the edges of the canvas, dealing with a three-dimensional world on a flat surface. Like the walls of a room, there's a sense of containment within the picture plane. This may change for me but up until now it's something that I like to work against.

**KB:** What is your favourite work of art?

**EM:** I don't really have a favourite work of art; rather lots of favourites. But if I was to pick something, it would be one of Goya's black paintings.

**KB:** What are your creative influences?

**EM:** I look at a lot of work and find inspiration and influence from other artist friends. Certain historical artists are hugely influential to me, but I guess creative influence can come from all sorts of sources.

**KB:** Do you regard your self as an Australian artist? Or a New Zealand artist? Is this important to you?

**EM:** This is a difficult question and one I guess I'm attempting to address in some of my recent paintings. I guess most of my paintings are about place and belonging. Landscape invariably brings up the issues of one's relationship to place – heritage, history – our place in the world. Someone suggested my place, if anywhere, was half way between the two (the middle of the Pacific Ocean?)!

**KB:** What other forms of creative expression do you enjoy that feeds your creativity?

**EM:** I find literature, films and travel to be extremely influential on my work. Maybe subtle, but sometimes, as in the case of [Andrei] Tarkovsky movies, quite overt. Travel too, feeds directly into the work. I love to paint while I'm on holiday and I'm sure these studies filter in. It's hard to know what actually inspires you. I think a lot of stuff filters in but the above are the most obvious. Oh, and I guess looking at other people's work can be inspirational. (Or irritating!) I prefer to live with other people's work, rather than my own.

**KB:** Do you think about work you have previously made? Does it leave your head once you have completed it or does it continue to develop into new work?

**EM:** It's difficult with previous work; you don't want to be too romantic about it as your focus needs to be on what you are working on currently - a bit like someone telling you how much more they enjoyed the old work. (Not terribly helpful). However, there does seem to be an almost circular nature to it all -- that you keep coming back to similar ideas. Often you are better equipped to deal with them, or even able to look at the same idea in a slightly different way. The same things seem to have preoccupied me and as long as I'm not doing it for its own sake (or the market), it seems OK. I think the worst thing is repeating yourself because you're not sure what else to do or it's what others want and expect. You need a good shit-o-meter, but I do think when I'm repeating myself I know.

**KB:** Why have you chosen to depict the artist/self in your work?

**EM:** For some reason, I've always dealt with the figure and the figure I know best, of course, is me. I guess we see the world from our own point of view and to a certain extent, everything I do seems to be a self-portrait. I'm not sure why - maybe I'm an egotist and, like the question before, you seem to go along for the ride, not quite knowing where you're going.

**KB:** Your work depicts an Australian / Aotearoan meld, an antipodean sublime. You capture the landscape at its most fecund - as if Gondwana has freshly split. Even the mountains seem freshly gashed. As I have mentioned to you in the past, the human figure is animalistic, at times like a sasquatch-type figure, at others only a mere presence. I am interested in your relationship to nature - the lack of the man-made (save for the elementary boat, fire and spade); the lack of any kind of civilisation. They are dark and heavy, but to my mind they remain filled with potential - unlike those who have gone before who feared Australia's enormity, you've realised it's not so frightening in the dark after all. The interior of Australia is womblike rather than a void. I often tell my kids that the world is exactly the same at night as it is during the day, you just can't see it as well. Does this concur at all with your view of the landscape?

**EM:** I felt at the end of reading your question (which I loved), this is the reason I prefer other people writing about the work than me attempting to explain them. It does seem ironical somehow that I'm attempting to explain things I probably don't fully understand myself. I'm certainly much more comfortable painting than writing and find discussing the work very problematic. It does seem as if it can close down the images, rather than open them up. I loved what you said and couldn't have written it nearly as well but feel I did my bit by painting the work that allowed you to make those associations. In the same way, I like to think I'm discovering and attempting to understand. It makes sense if the viewer is doing something similar. I think my most successful paintings are ones when I had very little idea where they were going.

**KB:** How long does it take on average to create a work?

**EM:** I generally work very quickly and like to get the energy into them. However, with the larger works especially, I will take weeks, months and sometimes even years, trying to 'resolve' them. The dilemma for me is to get them feeling right but not lose the energy/freshness.

**KB:** What artist has influenced you the most?

**EM:** That's a really difficult question. No one stands out, rather a lot of people, both international and local (sometimes friends). The influence can be quite subtle and I guess when I get into the studio I try and ignore painting like somebody else, or getting a certain look, or, as you mention in a subsequent question, the marketplace in all its manifestations. I really do love [Phillip] Guston's quote about everybody leaving one by one until there's only the artist and then hopefully they leave too, and the work begins. But of course my work is influenced by many different sources and in many different ways.

**KB:** Your rendering of the landscape and the inclusion of the human figure reminds me of Christine Jeff's beautiful film *Rain* (New Zealand, 2001), where the landscape is as much a character as the human protagonists. In that film the people are dwarfed by the landscape around them, even though they are experiencing such profound personal changes. Yet the landscape also foretells and provides an atmospheric narrative to the film. Is this something that is maybe a product of growing up in New Zealand - a dramatic and beautiful landscape surrounded by the sea on all sides? The landscape predicates our experiences somewhat (in Australia too - maybe an island thing?), the recent quake activity being a gentle tap on the shoulder to remind us who or what is in charge.

**EM:** I think you are right that there is something profound about New Zealand because you do see a distinct character in a lot of the arts of New Zealand (like Janet Frame). Funnily enough, the actress who played the mother in *Rain*, was going to buy a painting from a show in Wellington just recently, but took it back because of the title. There is also a specific emotional sense in Australia too (a harshness) that is quite different, but equally powerful. I suppose I've always been incredibly aware of the 'Australian-ness' but growing up in New Zealand, I just took it for granted; a kind of internalised melancholy.

**KB:** I am interested in your practice and the consistent strength of your work. I was reading an article by John McDonald in which he states: "There have been times when productivity has seemed disquieting, with pictures being knocked off with assembly-line efficiency. But being prolific doesn't mean that one is doomed to be shallow." I found it quite odd that 1. being prolific is something you need to be taken to task on and 2. that this would be seen as 'disquieting'. Certainly this seems to be the posturing of 'the critic', but does 'assembly-line efficiency' preclude creativity? - what else is an artist to do? To me that says that you are 'sustaining a practice'! It's an interesting split between practice (or work) and what the critic deems to be suitable or worthy. What is your opinion of criticism? What role does it play and do you feel, or have you ever felt the pressure of the market?

**EM:** Funny you should mention that quote because I did find that it unsettled me. This sense that somehow there's a 'right' number of works you should produce is, of course, ridiculous. I can see what he is saying but it's another one of those voices that you don't want or need in the studio. Sometimes I do feel embarrassed about how quickly I produce a work, or how many I produce, but it seems that's who I am and I'm not the Godfrey Miller type of painter who ponders endlessly (although I love his work and his drawings have an amazing energy). It seems that you need to

be constantly aware of what is best for you and your work and block out all the other crap that everyone tells you you should be doing.

I've been incredibly lucky with all my galleries and especially Frank Watters, who is so anti-anything to do with the marketplace. He told someone looking at my work once who asked him if he told me what to paint, "If Euan listened to what I told him to paint, I wouldn't want to show him". The other thing is I'm constantly surprised by which paintings people do want; often the most personal.

I do think criticism plays an incredibly important role for artists, even to the extent of having a sense that the exhibition has been seen and taken seriously. I can get very hurt by negative criticism and it's hard to separate work and self. The worst critics seem to me to be the ones with an agenda - an idea of what art should be.

**KB:** How do you measure success?

**EM:** That's a bloody hard question and one that needs to be totally irrelevant when you are in the studio. This is a problem with prizes but it only takes an hour or two painting to realise the success of winning is pretty shallow. I guess I would say success is the long race and would be to do with your own potential and how you were able to realise that.

**KB:** Do you use brushes and palette knife?

**EM:** Yes, I use both brushes and scrapers, rather than palette knives.

**KB:** How do you start a painting? Do you draw foundations and build from there, or do you just start with paint? Do you make preliminary drawings?

**EM:** I often make quick thumbnail sketches. These seem to happen a lot when I'm travelling or not able to do anything more substantial and they can become the start of a painting. But I also will just begin directly or, more often than not, work on small canvasses that become the starting point for the larger canvasses, if they seem to warrant it. I love to start with almost no idea and find the image on the canvas but this is quite difficult on a large scale. They tend to start with an idea in mind and then change from there. I guess I like the idea that I don't have a particular way of working as this seems to end up as producing the same old thing. I can't think of anything worse than knowing beforehand how a painting is going to look. I guess like going on a holiday and having everything worked out. It seems important to do everything possible to allow for discoveries, happy accidents, chance, whatever to occur, and somehow having a process seems to discount that.

**KB:** Are the figures determined by the landscape or vice versa? Do you see the image first in your head or build it on the painting surface as you work?

**EM:** I like this question, maybe because I've never really thought about it like that. Sometimes I have painted a landscape and put a figure in, moving it around until it feels right and I quite often have to play around with the scale of the figure. I also played around with painting a model and then adding in a landscape but I do think it

works best when both develop together. There is certainly a sense of the figure finding its rightful place but I also don't want this to become repetitive and the figure should add something to the landscape and vice versa, or else why have one?

**KB:** Do you use photographs as source material or as reference?

**EM:** In the past I used photos a lot and actually loved the snapshot nature that I'd get but I much prefer now to avoid them. Often I'll take them but not use them, or use them a lot later as the place is fading, such as with the Antarctica works. I'm finding the paintings are able to develop in a much more organic way and I think have more to do with what's in my head and a lot less to do with an actual place.

**KB:** Do you make stand-alone drawings? (i.e. not just as studies for paintings?)

**EM:** I used to do a lot of drawings that were able to be exhibited but I don't do it so much anymore as I find it a bit slow. I do the same thing now with oil paint on small canvases in the studio or acrylics on paper when travelling. I feel the need to go back to exploring drawing but most people think my drawings are more like paintings anyway. (Not that we worry about what others think!)

**KB:** Given the sculptural qualities of your paintings, have you tried your hand at sculpture?

**EM:** I have become more and more interested in sculpture. I've always been worried they look too much like [Alberto] Giacometti, although maybe not quite so skinny. I've been talking to a friend about mucking around with her materials and see if anything comes out of it.

**KB:** The works that depict the oversized figures using the landscapes as furniture (to my mind a masterstroke in your work) express so much about the human condition, the personal writ large, the enormity of memory, the desire for humanity to dominate nature, to bend it to our needs. The bathing figures in the harbour have a ponderous, lonely quality – like when we ruminate in a bath - as if the inward focus diminishes the physical world around us. Are these works more contemplative than the others for you? Are they invested with a different set of emotions or are they just logical extensions of the figure and landscape?

**EM:** It's interesting you picked this up as it was almost a conscious decision (where most of them aren't), to slow the figure down. I realise as I get older the need for reverie. I've never been, as you can probably see in the work, very good at relaxation. The figures were always in motion. Going somewhere, but who knows where? It was a conscious decision, both in the paintings and in real life. I think that old adage is applicable that we keep constantly trying to stay ahead of the demons. The bath ones were totally based on actually having a bath. I love the Bonnard paintings of his wife in the bath. Of course, there is an implied narrative that is the outcome of these huge figures, but often I don't think too much about that beforehand.

**KB:** The Antarctic works are revelatory in that you have drawn out the colour in that landscape. Photographers usually try to capture that blue coldness - an otherworldly alien landscape. Your depictions feel more honest in that the colours seem more logical and the land is more present than we are used to. They don't seem as foreign. It's like you have placed the figure back into the environment, where it once was? How did this trip impact on your work?

**EM:** I certainly went to Antarctica thinking it'd be useful for my work. Often I've found places that become important for me, or use places that represent aspects like my past (NZ), or my present (Australia). Antarctica does seem to suit my work and despite what some people said, it didn't seem that different for me. I think mainly in tone, and I love strong, angular landscapes, so it was pretty good. The funny thing, I realise, is that it's quite similar to mountainous areas of New Zealand, such as the Southern Alps. I've always found this type of landscape inspiring and when I was younger I did a bit climbing but it's never, up until now, found a way into my work. I can see Antarctica morphing into a more general New Zealand inspired environment. I guess, other than in the plein air paintings, I'm not that interested in a specific place like the figures - they are open to interpretation. There's a difficulty talking too much about the Antarctica paintings as I'm still not sure where they'll go and it seems better for me to let these things go in their own direction without having too much control.

**KB:** I'm interested in the works featuring the artist/figure and the work. They seem circular in that you depict the work depicting the work held by the artist/figure. Is this self-referentiality a comment on art-making or myth-making? Given the figure is obscured, do you see these as you allowing the work to speak for you, as a proxy?

**EM:** The "painter in the painting" is the title we settled on for the upcoming book (due out in November). It seems very appropriate to me. There are many precedents for this. The ones that stand out for me are Van Gogh's *The painter on the road to Tarascon* (1888) and Bacon's homage's to it, and Phillip Guston's series of the painter in the studio. It seemed obvious to paint about what I do - painting - and a comment on the modernist idea of painting about painting. It allowed me to combine New Zealand and Australian imagery. I always found it strange to be living in Australia and painting about New Zealand - the whole idea of whether I'm an Australian or a New Zealander that I'm constantly asked about. Sometimes painting landscape seems such a pointless exercise, attempting to capture the grandeur and monumentality on a silly little flat surface. Maybe that's why I made myself into a giant.

**KB:** What role does memory play in your work?

**EM:** I think memory is incredibly important - probably the most important influence on my work. It's probably hard to describe how it works but the things I paint, and the way I paint them, are inspired from my past. I tend to paint intuitively and the sense of what a painting needs and when it's finished would have its roots somewhere in my memory banks.

**KB:** Which is easier - working in the studio or en plein air? Is the latter more immediate, or does it require follow-up work in the studio?

**EM:** A teacher called his plein air works 'holidays' and this is right for me too. I love just painting what's in front of me without having to think about each mark. Obviously some marks are thought about more than others. I absolutely love being outside and painting - the fresh air etc, but mainly all the decisions are based on what is in front of me. I try not to think too much. Even the decision of what to paint is usually based on the most comfortable position. These paintings do have an influence on the work that is produced in the studio, but not necessarily directly. I think it's more the act of painting and the information I gather in the act of painting, rather than slavishly trying to replicate the plein air paintings. I may not even have them around but the act of painting them gets in there somewhere. A lot of people have commented on the freshness of the plein air works and I have attempted to get this quality into the studio works.

The studio works, of course, have another quality and, I would hope, say a lot more. As with the Antarctica works this is when the figure is introduced which does give the paintings a whole new layer.

## STAGES 1 – 3 (Years K-6)

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### THINK / TALK

- What do you think the Australian landscape looked like before Europeans arrived?
- What animals lived in the Australian bush before the Europeans arrived?
- What animals lived in the New Zealand bush before the Europeans arrived?
- Who lived in Australia before the Europeans arrived?
- Who lived in New Zealand before the Europeans arrived?
- Who do you think the person is in Euan's paintings?
- Who do you think it may represent?
- What tools has Euan used to paint his works?
- Describe the painting *Bathing figure in profile* 2005.
- Why do you think Euan has depicted the figure in this way?
- How do Euan's paintings make you feel?

### PLAY / MAKE

- Draw a picture of yourself in your favourite landscape.
- Construct a diorama and create a forest landscape. Place a figure inside it.
- Paint a self-portrait and include objects that you own in it.
- Act out a story using the image *Bathing figure in profile* 2005 as a reference.
- Write a story to describe the painting *Ditch* 1992
- Choose two of Euan's paintings and re-create them using the opposite colours to the original.
- Make a sculpture of one of Euan's figures using papier mache.



Boat removal, Christchurch c. 1962  
Collection of Euan Macleod

- Write a story about the above image



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Euan Macleod *Bathing figure in profile* 2005 oil on canvas 137 x 180cm Private Collection

## STAGES 4 – 5 (Years 7 -10)

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Fig.1. Euan Macleod *Cave man 1* 2001 oil on canvas 228 x 56cm  
Private Collection

Fig.2. Lee Harvey Oswald, accused of assassinating President Kennedy, is shot point-blank by Jack Ruby in the garage of the Dallas police headquarters, Texas on 24 November 1963 (detail), 1963.  
Photographer: Robert H. Jackson/AP

Fig.3. Francisco de Goya *Saturn devouring one of his children* 1819-23  
oil mural transferred to canvas 143 x 81cm Museo del Prado, Madrid

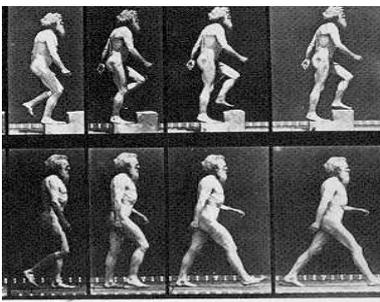


Fig.4. Detail of sequences by Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904) of himself throwing a disc, using a step, and walking.



Fig.5. Euan Macleod *Seascape through figures* 1997 oil on canvas  
180 x 300cm Collection of Richard Frolich

## THINK / TALK / WRITE

- Compare Fig.1, 2 & 3. Describe their similarities and differences. What are the feelings evoked in each picture over page?
- Research each image and describe the culture from which they came.
- Discuss the use of symbols in Macleod's work.
- Discuss the impact of Eadweard Muybridge's experiments depicting motion on modern art. How has this influenced Macleod's work *Seascape through figures* 1997? (see Fig.4 & 5)
- Name three other works that show the influence of Muybridge's experiments.
- How has the depiction of motion in art changed?
- Examine the work of Euan Macleod using the Postmodern frame / Contemporary framework. What relationships to other artists / artworks can you find?

## MAKE

- Paint an urban landscape in a similar style to Macleod's.
- Draw a landscape from memory. Add elements from your own experiences.
- Choose three objects from your childhood. Draw them each on separate sheets of paper. Arrange them into one composition and re-draw it.
- Draw an element from the landscape. Repeat the element and design a background. Using linocut, print a figure over the top.
- Cut out images of the landscape from magazines. Take elements from each and create a new landscape.
- Create a work that depicts motion.
- Create a collage of the landscape using junk mail.
- Sculpt a figure using natural materials, such as leaves, branches etc.



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Euan Macleod *Rowing x 4* 2008 oil on canvas 51 x 152cm Private collection



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Euan Macleod *Self portrait/head like a hole* 1998/1999 oil on canvas 180 x 137cm  
University of Technology Sydney Art Collection

## STAGE 6 (Years 11-12)

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Fig. 6. Tom Roberts  
*A quiet day on Darebin Creek [Merri Creek]*  
1885 oil on wood panel 26.4 x 34.8cm  
Collection National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

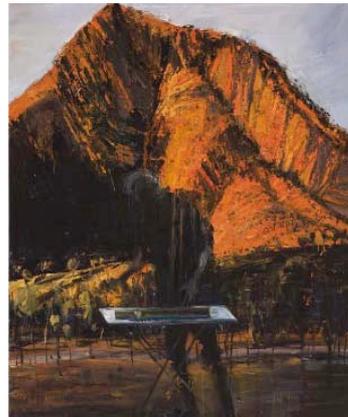


Fig. 7. Euan Macleod  
*Under red mountain / Flinders* 2008  
oil on canvas 180 x 150cm  
Private Collection

### THINK / TALK / WRITE

- Compare Fig 6 & 7. How have the artists depicted the landscape and figures?
- Find artworks that depict artists making art. Has the ways we represent art-making changed? Why?
- How do these works relate to the conceptual framework? Is there a difference in the audiences for both works?
- Discuss what you think denotes a good landscape painting and why?
- Examine different landscape paintings from around the world. How do they differ in style?
- Is the landscape in Macleod's paintings recognisably Australian or Aotearoan?
- Macleod uses paint in a very physical manner. What effect does this give his work?
- Describe Macleod's use of colour. Has it changed throughout his career? If so, how?
- Outline your subjective / personal response to Macleod's paintings.
- Choose one painting that you like and write a short description of why you like it.
- Choose a work you don't like and write a short description of why you don't like it.
- Discuss Macleod's work with someone who holds an opposite view to you. Both read the catalogue essay. How has your view changed?
- Examine Macleod's work. Do the paintings reference other artists' work? Do they refer to any issues in art-making or society in general?
- "All painting appropriates what has gone before." Discuss
- Identify an artist whose work is like Macleod's. Describe why.
- Write a report on the symbolism in Euan Macleod's work.
- Explain how Macleod's work fits into Australian landscape traditions. Explain how it doesn't.

- Read Gavin Wilson's catalogue essay. What does the essay reveal about Macleod's images?
- Describe Macleod's symbolism
- What recurring motifs appear in Macleod's work?
- What does the human presence in Macleod's work represent?
- Read the Wikipedia page for Macleod: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euan\\_MacLeod](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euan_MacLeod). What else should appear on the entry for the artist? What issues are important when examining an artist's work?
- Describe Macleod's style.



Fig. 8. Caspar David Friedrich  
*Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* 1818  
oil on canvas 94 x 74.8 cm  
Kunsthalle, Hamburg



Fig. 9. Caspar David Friedrich  
*Women before the Rising Sun (Woman before the Setting Sun)* 1818-20  
oil on canvas  
Private collection

- Examine the works by Caspar David Friedrich (Fig. 8 & 9) above. How does Macleod's work compare?
- What are the stylistic differences?
- What are the cultural differences? What do the works communicate about the time in which they were made?
- Compare Macleod's work with other Australian landscape painters. How does his work compare? What are the similarities and differences?
- Examine other works depicting a lone figure in the landscape (e.g Frederick McCubbin, Antony Gormley). How does Macleod's work compare?
- Examine the paintings *Present 2008* and *Holding Turtle 2008*. Apply the postmodern frame / contemporary framework and analyse the artist's depiction of the painting apparatus. What do you think he is saying about painting?



Fig. 10. Euan Macleod *Figure on yellow road*  
1991 oil on canvas 138 x 183cm  
Tweed River Art Gallery Collection



Fig. 11 Louise Hearman *Untitled # 980*  
2002 oil on masonite 61 x 79cm  
Courtesy Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery

- Compare the work by Euan Macleod and Louise Hearman (Fig.10 & 11). What are the differences and similarities?
- Examine the choice of works in *Surface Tension*. Can you identify a narrative? What story is told?
- Using Google, search for images and curate your own Euan Macleod exhibition. Write an accompanying curatorial statement for your choices.
- Using Google, search for landscape paintings that feature the human figure. Compare them to Macleod's. What do they tell us about the landscape they depict?
- Read text NO.1. Has the exhibition delivered the aims set out in this description? If not, why not? How could this have been better achieved?
- Read text NO.2. What has the critic said about Macleod's work? Is it positive or negative? What role does this review play in terms of Macleod's career?

## MAKE

- Draw a series of views of the same landscape. Add a figure walking through each of the drawings.
- Create a design for a theatre backdrop that depicts the landscape in your region.
- Take 5 digital photographs of the landscape around your school. Create a composite image using elements from the 5 photos.
- Draw a simple figure on a piece of transparency. Paint a detailed landscape. Place the transparency over the completed painting. Move it around until you are happy with the placement of the figure. You can reproduce the figure as many times as you like to create movement.
- Shoot a video of a person in your backyard. Have them stand motionless for 2 minutes. Create 5 different soundtracks for the piece and try each one out until you are happy with it. How did the image change with each soundtrack?

## TEXTS

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### NO.1

*Surface Tension: the art of Euan Macleod 1991-2009*, will explore the artist's highly personal negotiation of the Australian landscape - a landscape in which the human figure has a presence equal to the terrain. The exhibition will trace Macleod's distillation of elements from both the Australian bush and his homeland, the South Island of New Zealand. The audience will witness the artist's tense wrestle with duality – fat and thin pigments, Australia verses New Zealand, father and son, absence and presence – all these conflicting relationships are ultimately confronted in the figure and the ground. The intensity of Macleod's investigation is leavened by the artist's droll sense of humour, reflected in work such as *Wheelbarrow man* (2007).

From deep-felt encounters with the landscapes of the NSW central-west, the soaring peaks of the MacDonnell Ranges out of Alice Springs and the harbours of New Zealand's South Island, the exhibition will provide regional audiences with a compelling, highly-original vision of the Australian / New Zealand experience.

Through a careful selection and curation of Macleod's imagery, the exhibition will demonstrate a spiritual dimension to his work that amplifies its universal value.

**Description of exhibition by curator Gavin Wilson, Visions of Australia Development Grant Application. Tweed River Art Gallery, 2010**

### NO.2

"Another exponent of the spontaneous approach is Euan Macleod (b.1956), who was awarded the inaugural *Plein Air Painting Prize* at NSW Parliament House last month. There have been times when Macleod's productivity has seemed disquieting, with pictures being knocked off with assembly-line efficiency. But being prolific doesn't mean that one is doomed to be shallow.

Macleod's exhibition at Watters Gallery, *Boats and Other Paintings*, is large but there is nothing gratuitous or overdone about these paintings. The works are filled with views of Central Australia or the coast but the central drama concerns the beings that inhabit these landscapes. From the generic, grey figure of an artist painting in the desert to the anonymous shapes of man and boy (father and son?) in a dinghy, these could be seen as Symbolist pictures. In other words, there is a central symbol in every work that stands for something far greater than its ostensible appearance.

The dinghy feels like a symbol of the self - afloat in the ocean or washed up in the desert. A figure pushing a wheelbarrow full of steaming compost could be God or the devil moving the smouldering sphere of the earth. In a work such as *Station No. 10*, the black silhouette of a man seems to merge with a darkness thrown down by the rocky outcrops of the outback. And what is one to make of those works where an artist is painting a large vista of sea and sailboats in the midst of a red, sandy wasteland?

One senses that there are deeply personal elements in these paintings that are being simultaneously revealed and concealed. Macleod has an idea he wants to exorcise and painting is his natural mode of expression. At the same time, painting is an imprecise language that admits all manner of mysteries and ambiguities. One could read these pictures simply as examples of that familiar theme, "figure in a landscape", but there is something in the starkness of the backdrops and the anonymity of the figures that gives each image a dark, primeval force. On this occasion, the confrontation with the self that comes with the examination of the landscape is an interrogation conducted in the shadows."

***Secrets of the self unearthed.* John McDonald, *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 6, 2008**

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts/secrets-of-the-self-unearthed/2008/06/06/1212259067679.html?page=fullpage>

## ***SURFACE TENSION: THE ART OF EUAN MACLEOD 1991 – 2009* EXHIBITION DVD**

Produced by Tim Cole. Interview between Curator, Gavin Wilson and Euan Macleod, showing artworks in the artist's studio.

### **VIDEO**

[http://eprints.utas.edu.au/9322/1/euan\\_macleod\\_24\\_8\\_07.mp4](http://eprints.utas.edu.au/9322/1/euan_macleod_24_8_07.mp4)

### **WEB LINKS**

Watters Gallery, Sydney, NSW, Australia

[www.wattersgallery.com/artists/Macleod/macleodnew1.html](http://www.wattersgallery.com/artists/Macleod/macleodnew1.html)

Niagara Galleries, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

[www.niagara-galleries.com.au/artists/artistpages/theartists/euan\\_macleod/macleodframe.html](http://www.niagara-galleries.com.au/artists/artistpages/theartists/euan_macleod/macleodframe.html)

Bowen Galleries, Wellington, New Zealand

[www.bowengalleries.co.nz/artists/macleod.php](http://www.bowengalleries.co.nz/artists/macleod.php)

Brooke-Gifford Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand

[brookegiffordgallery.co.nz/exhib/519](http://brookegiffordgallery.co.nz/exhib/519)

[brookegiffordgallery.co.nz/exhib/2076](http://brookegiffordgallery.co.nz/exhib/2076)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euan\\_MacLeod](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euan_MacLeod)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landscape\\_art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landscape_art)

<http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/default.htm>

### **GLOSSARY**

**Protagonist:** the principal character in a play, story, etc.

**Symbolism:** the practice of representing things by symbols, or of investing things with a symbolic meaning or character.

**Aotearoa:** the Maori name for New Zealand.

**En plein air:** (French) 'in the open air.'

**Picturesque:** views seen as being artistic but containing elements of wildness or irregularity.

**Pastoral:** having the simplicity, charm, serenity, or other characteristics generally attributed to rural areas.

**Post-colonial:** of or pertaining to the period following a state of colonialism.

**Terra Nullius:** land belonging to no-one (no Man's land) The expression is used in international law to describe territory which has never been subject to the sovereignty of any state, or over which any prior sovereign has expressly or implicitly relinquished sovereignty. Sovereignty over territory which is *terra nullius* may be acquired through occupation, though in some cases doing so would violate an international law or treaty.

## FURTHER RESEARCH

### ANTECEDENTS & CONTEMPORARIES

- Pierre Bonnard
- Edvard Munch
- Oskar Kokoschka
- Chaim Soutine
- William Turner
- Eugene von Guerard
- Leon Kossoff
- Frank Auerbach
- Francis Bacon
- Anselm Kiefer
- Davida Allen
- Susan Norrie
- Susan Rothenberg
- Peter Booth
- Francisco de Goya
- Colin McCahon
- Anselm Kiefer
- Kiki Smith
- Louise Hearman
- Darren Siwes
- Antony Gormley
- William Robinson
- Arnulf Rainer
- Georg Baselitz
- Jörg Immendorff
- Alberto Giacometti
- James Abbott McNeill Whistler
- Eadweard Muybridge
- David Lynch
- Gerhard Richter
- Nicholas Poussin
- Diego Velasquez
- Paul Cezanne
- Pablo Picasso
- Ian Fairweather
- Willem De Kooning
- Hans Hofmann
- Richard Diebenkorn
- Petrus Van der Velden
- Toss Woollaston
- Colin McCahon