

What draws you to paint landscapes?

I'm not really drawn to paint the landscape, though of course I'm looking at the landscape all the time. There is always so much to see—what I absorb somehow finds its way into more abstract painting.

To tell you the truth, when I was faced with the New Zealand landscape, I was at a bit of a loss because it's not my usual way of working. But when I was painting with acrylics on Mount Ruapehu, I had to be dragged off the mountain—the sun was coming down, there was the most amazing light—everyone else had finished and were yelling, "C'mon Ann!"

I was very conscious of other New Zealand painters when I was there: Colin McCahon, Euan [Macleod] and another friend, John Reid. There's something in their work—a big depth and an interest in the void—I can't quite explain it but it's part of the New Zealand psyche. They have a sense of dramatic isolation, whereas our existence is so very different.

Can you outline your process from plein air to studio?

I was looking at something and painting it—then I would think 'this painting needs something here' so I'd look again and find it. It was an accumulation of different things. A lot of painters feel obliged to record the landscape. I don't—I use it for purposes of my very own. Once you go away from New Zealand, it doesn't matter if the painting is the same as what you saw. Everything is moving all the time. The other thing I did was to just draw, look and feel the difference of being in New Zealand—to allow that to enter me so when I come back here, the paintings that I do have that added to them. The word 'felt' is perhaps very important. The final work is an ephemeral thing. I'm not really there to do a [single] work. It's a continuing work.

What materials did you find most useful?

Instead of using oils, I used new acrylic paints with lovely gels you could mix with them—the mixing made [the acrylics] go with paper. I'm into marrying materials with whatever you're painting. And when you're painting on canvas it's different to painting on paper so you mix it in a different way.

The paper works were finished things themselves. I can't look at those and then do a painting. It would only be less, not more. I have to use my own peculiar process—with it going through me, getting into my inner source, then it coming out as something different.

How did you find working with a large group of painters?

Ten other painters—it's pretty large when you're used to working by yourself in a studio for years! It was stimulating to be with a group of artists with diverse approaches to their work. They were such good company and to engage in a really good talk about art—so different from being shut away alone in my studio ... which, by the way, I like.

What did you enjoy most, overall, from the trip?

Somebody was cooking and it wasn't me! And just having all the clutter of normal everyday life taken away and you were there to paint—I love that. ■

Ann Thomson is represented by Australian Galleries, Sydney and Heiser Gallery, Brisbane.
www.australiangalleries.com.au
www.heisergallery.com.au



01 **Stone images**, 2009, acrylic and collage on canvas, 67 x 108cm
02 **Among the mountains**, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 77 x 102cm

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ANN THOMPSON

Ann Thomson, born in Brisbane in 1933, began studying art in the 1950s with some of Australia's finest modern artists. Thomson moved to Sydney and completed her studies at the National Art School, graduating in 1962. She began exhibiting in the 1960s with her first solo show at Watters Gallery, and since then has exhibited widely across Australia and internationally in institutions such as the Art Gallery of NSW, Musee de l'Art Walloon, Belgium and Lui Hat-su National Art Museum, Shanghai. Major surveys of Thomson's work have been curated at the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane and at Monash University Art Gallery, Melbourne. In 1998 Thomson receive the Wynne Prize at the AGNSW, followed in 2002 by the Geelong Contemporary Art Prize. Her work is held in the collections of the National Gallery of Australia, the Queensland Art Gallery and the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection in Madrid.

