

EUAN MACLEOD

Euan MacLeod, born in Christchurch, completed a Diploma of Fine Arts (Painting) at Canterbury University, New Zealand in 1979. He relocated to Sydney in 1981 where he now lives and works while still exhibiting extensively in both New Zealand and Australia. MacLeod's work is represented in many public collections including the National Gallery of Australia, the National Gallery of Victoria, and the Parliament House Collection. MacLeod has been a repeat finalist in multiple art prizes, winning both the Archibald Prize in 1999 for his *Self portrait/head like a hole* and the Sulman Prize in 2001.



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- 01 **Castlepoint study**, 2009, oil on canvas, 70 x 90cm
02 **Lucy, Mt Ruapehu**, 2009, oil on canvas, 60 x 70cm
03 **Steve, Mt Ruapehu**, 2009, oil on canvas, 40 x 50cm

What draws you to paint landscapes?

I came from New Zealand at a time when landscape seemed to be the only subject—there was the overbearing presence of Colin McCahon, but also all my teachers (and my mother) produced work based on landscape. I did try to reject it, and all my early work involved the figure, but the landscape crept in, initially through the power of the Australian landscape, which allowed me to re-look at my 'homeland'. I still see my work as being between the figure and landscape—and also New Zealand and Australia.

What are your views on the currency of landscape painting in contemporary art?

It has certainly been seriously uncool for most of my painting life. Modernism and internationalism meant an end to specific time/place-based works, although artists such as [Fred] Williams and McCahon seemed to be able to blend the two. There seems to have been a return, in that curators are considering landscape work again, but often with an emphasis on style, irony or quoting. In a way, I've enjoyed being outside current fashion. The biggest change has been Aboriginal painting, which is so much about a sense of place and belonging.

What do you gain from working in the landscape?

My work involves landscape to such a large extent so working directly in the landscape keeps me fresh. I'm forced to look.

Can you outline your process from plein air to studio?

I work outside quickly, usually in acrylics (so I can carry them), and very rarely work on them once I get back to the studio. I may work directly from the plein air studies or they become a way of familiarising myself with a place but I see the initial studies as works in their own right.

What materials did you find most useful on the trip?

It was amazing to be able to work on site in oils. The logistics usually make it too difficult. Because of this opportunity, I hardly worked in acrylics at all and, other than the occasional rat, the paintings survived the journey very well.

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

It's more usual for me to work outside other artists and I have been on quite a few artist trips, mainly to various places throughout Australia. I love the interaction and camaraderie that can come out of these trips—the shared problems that plein air throws up, such as flies, climate, weather changes, tourists and just the bloody difficult process of getting something on your board that bears relevance to the majesty in front of you.

What did you enjoy most from the trip overall?

The opportunity to be supplied with paint and funded to go to New Zealand with a group of artists I admire was pretty amazing. I also loved the idea of introducing a part of New Zealand to a group of Australian artists who hadn't on the whole been there—even if some of them did still take the piss out of our accents! ■

Euan MacLeod is represented by Watters Gallery, Sydney, Niagara Galleries, Melbourne and Bowen Galleries, Wellington.
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