

JUDITH VAN HEERAN

Judith Van Heeren has quietly built up a respected career over decades of art practice devoted to the study of the natural world. Born in the Netherlands she lives on the coast near Melbourne. Judith has a dedicated following of supporters and is represented in Melbourne by Murray White Room. Her works are held in the National Gallery of Victoria's collection as well as many important private collections. Van Heeren has received a residency at the Moya Dyring studio of les Cite International des arts, Paris for the months of May and June 2010.



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What draws you to paint landscapes?

I don't regard myself as a landscape painter as such. I'm more interested in the environment as a whole and in all the living things that inhabit it, so a landscape for me is a context for those things rather than a particular geographical place.

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

I would like to redefine the role of landscape painting. I am not interested in the classic or romantic notion of landscape. The environment now is so vulnerable that I think contemporary artists have a responsibility to inform as well as to represent. We can no longer separate the landscape from the environment that it is part of.

What do you gain from working in the landscape?

The walking is my working. I have always been a studio painter so this is the first time I have worked directly in the landscape, although part of my daily practice is to walk for two or three hours within the landscape. When I'm outside, I want to absorb the landscape and when I'm in the studio I want to be absorbed in the painting. Therefore landscapes in my paintings are about a mood, an emotion, a feeling or an atmosphere rather than a specific place.

Can you outline your process from plein air to final work?

During the New Zealand trip I made initial sketches of the landscape. In the following week, I went back there to get a closer look at some of places that we had seen from a distance. I did several long walks, including to the crater lakes in the Tongariro National Park, which helped my understanding of the unique New Zealand environment. Later I researched how these areas have evolved, especially since European settlement, and the impact this has had on the environment and thus on the landscape.

When I returned home I made working drawings with ink and

watercolour, using my initial sketches as landscape references. I also incorporated drawings of animals including deer, goats, birds and possums, which were all introduced since European settlement and influenced the landscape.

The final stage is to use these drawings as ideas for paintings. For me, oil painting is a different process where the initial ideas are developed in the studio. Each painting is not simply a reproduction of an earlier drawing but instead it evolves in response to the medium, becoming simpler in some respects and more complex in others.

What materials did you find most useful on the trip?

Because of the way I work, watercolours and a small sketchbook were all that I needed on the trip.

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

I am normally a very private painter and work alone so at first it was a bit challenging to be out of my comfort zone but I think we all soon relaxed. I enjoyed learning about other artists' processes and it was an enriching experience to see how other artists work. ■

Judith Van Heeren is represented by Murray White Room, Melbourne.
www.murraywhiteroom.com
www.judithvanheeran.blogspot.com

Exhibition
 23 October – 29 November, 2009, Murray White Room, Sargood Lane, Melbourne, VIC

- 01 **Possums** (working drawing), 2009, ink, water colour and gouache on paper, 77 x 18.5cm
- 02 **Emerald crater lake and goats** (working drawing), 2009, ink, water colour and gouache on paper, 77 x 18.5cm
- 03 **Tuatara lizard and huia's** (working drawing), 2009, ink, water colour and gouache on paper, 77 x 18.5cm



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