

Euan Macleod

b.1956

Certificate in Graphic Design: Christchurch Polytechnic
Diploma of Fine Arts: Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury

Euan Macleod's paintings are a summoning forth of great energy. His brushwork is raw and dynamic; the paint is often roughly applied, irregular, gritty, with spills and smears of pigment. It is as if he wants his finished paintings to have something of the raw, unfinished quality of the physical world in which he lives.

Earth, water and air are looming presences in Macleod's art. He often places figures out in those elements: striding across land, rowing out to sea, wading or falling through the air. The figures merge with the elements around them, as if they are made of the same materials. Macleod is also fascinated with the element of fire; he has painted volcanoes and fiery evening skies. For him, the process of painting is an outpouring of energy, an eruption.

Macleod doesn't paint portraits, as such. You could, however, think of the inhabitants of his paintings as self-portraits, at a distance. These gaunt figures are nearly always naked and bald. Reduced to their bare bones and sinuous muscles, they are like trees that have lost their leaves. We don't see their eyes; we don't know what they are seeing or what they are thinking. Their faces are usually lost in shadows, their skin as grey as an overcast sky, a stormy ocean or a quarry. The characters don't look towards the viewer, nor do they engage with us; they are preoccupied with their own world and their own labours. There is anxiety and unease in the paintings, but also a sense of heroic struggle.

Macleod's paintings describe states of mind, scenes from his inner life, his dreams and nightmares. Echoes of Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*, Greek mythology, Grimm's fairy tales and science fiction reverberate through his images. *Boy In Barrow In Water* could be a scene from a tale about leaving home, or about arriving back.

Macleod moved to Sydney when he was 26 and has lived there ever since. But having studied at the Canterbury School of Fine Arts, his painting is steeped in a particular tradition of Expressionism, from Rudi Gopas to Philip Clairmont and

onwards to younger artists such as Jason Greig and Tony de Lautour. He has continued to exhibit in New Zealand and visits here regularly. Amongst his most remarkable recent paintings are an ongoing series of canvases in which he returns to Lyttelton Harbour, where he spent much of his boyhood; *Boy In Barrow In Water* is from that ongoing sequence.

It is often evening or nightfall in Macleod's canvases. It is as if the light and space is being squeezed out of the paintings. He lifts events and characters from the darkness of distant memory and presents them afresh. As you get older, you think more and more about what it meant to be a young person. That is what Macleod is doing here. *Boy In Barrow In Water* is a painting of one person — the artist himself — as an old man pushing himself, as a child, in a dinghy-like wheelbarrow. Onwards.

Gregory O'Brien

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Philip Clairmont
Tony de Lautour
Rudi Gopas
Jason Greig

