
Tony Lloyd

Lost Highways



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It is hard to forget your first encounter with a Tony Lloyd painting.

The dramatic light and exaggerated perspective lures you in, the luscious paintwork and tonal perfection seduces you while the content promises a spectacular climax but leaves you somehow suspended, elated and light-headed. Even his scenes of nocturnal disquiet quicken the pulse, flooding our bodies with adrenaline.

Tony Lloyd's paintings engender a level of excitement even when they are still, because they also engender a sense of anticipation. Saturated in a cinematic half-light, we almost expect the silence to be shattered by a shrill scream. The paintings have a sense of time frozen, between some pre and post-climax. But they are also, increasingly, timeless. They haunt us through their penetrating ambiguity, and speak of nowhere and of no-when.

Lloyd's practice now spans over

a decade, in which time he has accumulated an evolving body of work that addresses a variety of themes while remaining loyal to a unique and singular vision. As his technique has matured so too has the breadth of this vision. From arcane highways at night and urbanity steeped in peril, his oeuvre has progressed into the deeply unfathomable, and the greater philosophical and spiritual problems we face today. We see his work culminating, presently, in massive sweeping panoramas that recall the Romantic sublime, but also deny any specific influence. They are at once uncannily familiar and strangely elusive.

Tony Lloyd emerged from RMIT in the late 1990s at a time when many contemporary artists were reconnecting with the brush and canvas. While the death of painting has never actually eventuated, despite the forecasts of its commentators, there has been an undeniable resurgence in the last

LEFT

Cat. 12
Silver 2004

'The road is such a fantastic metaphor for anything'

decade of artists who employ paint in the service of their moods and emotions. The Neo-Expressionists of thirty years ago are now all but forgotten – these new painters are characterised by a meticulous attention to detail and the thrilling rush of transcendence. Their work is unashamedly beautiful and humbling; an ism for the perpetually rushed and spiritually bereft naughties.

The road and the highway became a recurring motif in Tony Lloyd's work in the late 1990s, dominating his first exhibitions. Without realising it then his first road painting had come much earlier during art school, but like many of his themes, it made a subsequent return. In *Woodlands* [Cat. No. 5] we see this theme clearly played out: a long, straight road is lit by blurred car headlights. The forestry and darkness loom silently on either side, waiting to close in. It is a reality that confronts us nightly, but here becomes the scene of a gripping drama. Like

much of Lloyd's work it is derived from cinema as much as from personal experience and memory, but he stipulates that the two are indistinguishable: 'Film does occur to you [in the same way as actual experience]. It is as much a part of your memory as real things'.

The road as motif continued for many years, always throwing up new ideas and new meanings. We see his approach evolve in later works such as *Dissolving Shadows* [Cat. No. 8] and *Route 13* [Cat. No. 11]. 'The road is such a fantastic metaphor for anything', Lloyd says. 'Where you can only see what the headlights show, you have to imagine the rest'. It is in these twilight evocations of motorways that the imagination awakens; we must speculate on the need for our speed, and on our destination and point of departure. Like much of Lloyd's output, the roadways are a people-free zone. While the presence of humans is implied we are relieved of their

OPPOSITE

Cat. 5
Woodlands 2001

Cat. 3
Skystone 2004





'The peril — real or imagined — is ours alone to contend with'

company, making us the sole participant; the protagonist. We might watch silently from the back seat as the trees form a continuous blur or we might occupy the driver's seat, staring down a harrowing strip of tarmac, but always, it is us and us only. The peril – real or imagined – is ours alone to contend with.

The point-of-view perspective is another cinematic device that Lloyd employs. Its application underpins the essential nature of his work: its inversion of the high-art hierarchy of painting and film. 'Cinema is based on the pictorial language of painting', as Lloyd explains. 'I have flipped this around and base my painting on the pictorial language of film'.

The roads series, then, is based on a combination of *Mad Max* and *Lost Highway*, with a nod to Edgar G. Ulmer's 1945 film-noir classic *Detour*. Lloyd takes still images from films to capture a frozen moment within a wider narrative, to give us a sense of a kind of incoherent story

board. There are events unfolding, we are told, but we are not privileged with an insight; we cannot ascertain the storyline that we are caught up in.

In denying us the full narrative Lloyd's paintings are dislocated fragments without climax or closure. We are reminded of Italo Calvino's novel *If On a Winter's Night a Traveller*, which contained ten incomplete novel fragments, all of distinct genres, all incomplete. The effect is of a constant state of delayed resolution; of unsettling infinitude. A space is left for the viewer to participate, with every individual to encounter the works perceiving a different story, and arriving at a unique conclusion.

Lloyd's use of darkness invites a similar collaboration with the viewer. Here, one must imagine what is NOT depicted by the artist – the viewer must contribute by filling in the blanks. This is particularly so in works such as *Fever* [Cat. No. 14] and

LEFT

Cat. 8
Dissolving shadow
2002

Cat. 11
Route 13 2006

OVER

Cat. 9
Myriad 2002

Cat. 7
Deep in the woods
2002





'The dark, in its stygian opacity, masks only what we choose to conceal within it'

I'm Almost With You [Cat.No.15], where only a splinter of a wider scene is revealed. Any sense of looming dread is therefore a product of the imagination of the viewer, as is any obverse sense of serenity or placidity. The dark, in its stygian opacity, masks only what we choose to conceal within it, and so contributes to the 'unexplained mystery' theme that similarly runs through Lloyd's practice.

After years of devotion to the uncanny, to the mysterious and the sometimes sinister, it seems only natural that Lloyd should begin painting UFOs. But their appearance, in 2005, came not in the pursuit of a science-fictional fanaticism, but in an effort to achieve greater depth. 'The UFOs are a pictorial device', Lloyd explains. 'When you are in the process of making a painting it often seems flat and abstract. The introduction of an element in the sky – such as the UFO – makes the space recede'. The choice of

an unidentified flying object, clearly, was not arbitrary – especially when coupled with Egyptian pyramids or other scenes of supernatural intrigue [Cats. No. 31,32,33,34]. Their inclusion is, in part, a concession to Post-Modernism. After years of depicting distillations of some faded memory, Lloyd began to quote freely and frequently from his source material.

The first work in which direct quotation appeared also marked the first appearance of a UFO in Lloyd's oeuvre. *A Short History of Lost Time* [Cat. No. 28] borrowed its title, in part, from Marcel Proust's 'In Search of Lost Time', and is a polyptych comprising thirty-three canvasses. Lloyd set out to create a compendium of 'involuntary memories' based around the idea of 'lost time'. Subsequently we see images such as Pandora's Box, Harold Holt's search party, September 11, a missile launch, a Luna eclipse, David Hicks, a ghost

PREVIOUS

Cat. 14
Fever 2006-2009

'Quoting directly from films has allowed Lloyd to amass a greater distance from them'

ship and many others, bound by the notion of time in absence or retreat. In thinking 'in terms of a one way journey', and 'of moments that are now lost in time', *Lost Time* was to prove a pivotal series of works for the artist.

Quoting directly from films, memories and photographs has, ironically, allowed Lloyd to amass a greater distance from them. With the problem of content now solved, the artist increased his use of a monochromatic spectrum. The application of colour – or lack of it – has enabled Lloyd to contemplate the 'essence of the image'. Denuded of representational hues we are made to focus on the image, and for a unique 'feeling' to emerge. While he stresses the work is not meant to be nostalgic, it more often than not is. How else to explain our familiarity with visions that we never have, and never will personally encounter? In their washed out colours and slightly blurred effect we are reminded

of faded family photographs, or of holidays taken by our grandparents. Nostalgia has been diagnosed in recent times as an emotion rather than an ailment while remaining, like its cousin, melancholy, notoriously difficult to define. Nostalgia, as it appears within Tony Lloyd's otherworldly evocations, is a form of bitter-sweetness; of a love of longing for times and places unreachable.

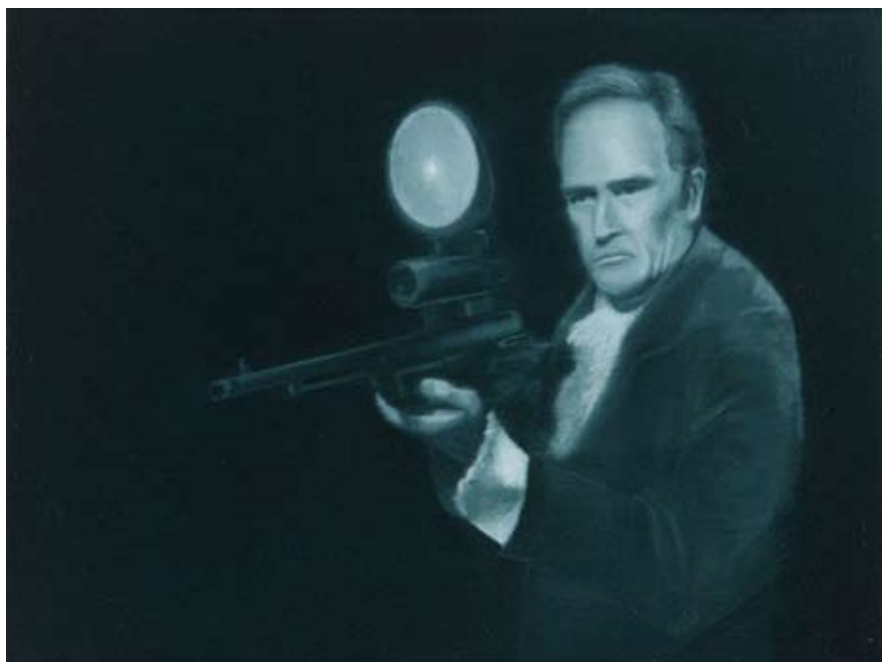
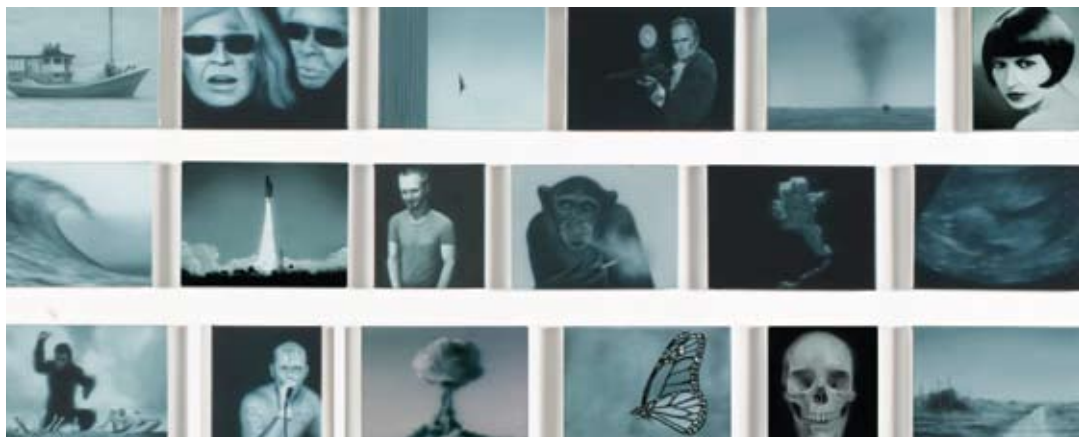
While we may think of many of Lloyd's paintings as 'black', the artist rejects black as a colour. He advocates instead a palette comprising of greyish blues and greens, and more often than not employs these two colours only. 'The work is held together by the colour' he notes. And it is true – in spite of widely diverging topics the canvasses are unified by their conformity to monochrome. Of critical import is the arousal of a particular mood or feeling; Lloyd decries black and white as 'really emotionally cold. Black is a really difficult colour to work with'. It is,

PAGES 12-13

Cat. 28
*A short history of
lost time 2006*

[details]









'I want to create an illusion that the viewer can lose themselves in'

however, not entirely absent from his work, as we see in a canvas such as *Give Me Just a Little More Time* [Cat. No. 22] – a canvas which he describes as having being 'immensely difficult to paint', consuming over three months of daily, patient attention. The work was ultimately a characteristic success through its balance of emotional detachment and emotional warmth.

In *Lux Aeterna* [Cat. No. 21], another massive canvas at 280 x 150cm, we detect the omnipotent presence of sinister forces closing in on a helpless city, in spite of its apparently anodyne evocation of a pilot's-eye view of a metropolis in fog. Here, we experience Lloyd's inclination for dramatic effect; his seeking to add 'something ominous to temper any sentimental aura that they [paintings] put out'. Similarly we witness a kind of pastoral tension in *Eternity* [Cat. No. 19] and *Some Velvet Morning* [Cat. No. 20], where the meditative glow of the dawn or sunset is reprimanded

by a hazy disquiet. This is the peace not of slumber, but of inebriation – we want to be lucid, we seek clarity, but are denied through the lulling intoxication of the Picturesque. The climactic drama is in remission, and we gaze out through dreamy, half-closed eyes.

Much of the impact of these canvasses is achieved through the sumptuous and luminous surface effect. For Lloyd, surface is crucial: 'I want to create an illusion that the viewer can lose themselves in'. In this he becomes the master showman; a perpetrator of illusions for audiences who willingly submit to his fictions. The seductive tonality of the paint is hard to deny, and like the spectacle of the classical Illusionist's performance, we – the audience – are treated to a thrilling parade of showmanship. Lloyd, ever the erudite artist, achieves his effects through long hours of hard work. His achievements are due largely to persistent and patient labour. He

PAGE 14

Cat. 29
Asylum 2006

Cat. 30
Shadowmaker
2006

PREVIOUS

Cat. 33
The invention of history 2008

Cat. 32
Remember me
2008

OPPOSITE

Cat. 21
Lux aeterna
2004

Cat. 25
Eclipse 2008









'Living in Rome I was surrounded by things that were 2,000 years old daily'

will add certain oils to the paint to decelerate the drying process, and while he hardly ever sketches from life anymore, he admits 'I always have a critical faculty in everything I look at'. Life, for Lloyd, has become one long film noir.

His studio provides all the source material he needs – his photographs, books, computer and, recently, scale models. Lining the walls are a litany of canvasses that primarily bear the imprint of his present fascination: mountains. Often the works will speak of the future, or have the aura of the future without implicitly describing anything that is futuristic. While at the same time they suggest a distant past, tinged with the faint melancholic wisp of nostalgia. Which heralds one of Lloyd's great contradictions and enduring points of interest: his works are insistently of the here and now – placing us squarely in the present moment of experience – but speak of time immemorial; of 'all time'.

Where the early road theme concerned the artist's (or the viewer's) place in the world, we were permitted to discern a specific time and geography. But now, in these monumental Post-Romantic mountain-scapes, we are denied this opportunity as the works increasingly elude cultural denomination. These works, and the UFO pictures that preceded them, first found form during an artist residency in Rome in 2007. 'Living in Rome I was surrounded by things that were 2,000 years old daily. Timelessness became a reality'. Since having been made acutely aware of his place in time, Lloyd undertook to recreate that sense of our microcosmic existence, and of the infinity of time.

Lloyd describes his latest works, with tongue place somewhere in the region of his cheek, as 'Super-Romantic'. To be sure, they are abundantly fertile in their sublimity, and they facilitate a meditation on the awe-inspiring grandeur of creation.

PAGE 18

Cat. 20
Some velvet morning
2004

PAGE 19

Cat. 19
Eternity 2004

LEFT

Cat. 38
Year zero 2007

Cat. 36
One million years
2006

'Lloyd's mountains shatter the illusion of the sublime'

But they are not transcendent; they are not so much a window into another world but a meticulously framed view, shot with cinema-scope, of a scene that, assuming we were in the right place at the right time, we might actually encounter. Nevertheless, the mountain-scapes are haunting, spine-tingling, and frequently overwhelming. Their relationship with the sublime might be considered 'Post-Romantic', in that while they concern the idea of the unreachable, they do not blindly assume the existence of the sublime; of a force in existence greater than our capacity to comprehend. These paintings assert that we can only assume the existence of that which we can perceive. Accordingly, Lloyd's mountains shatter the illusion of the sublime, and reveal the majestic as being a construct of our culture.

In composition and subject matter *Tomorrow Follows Yesterday* [Cat. No. 40] is a direct pastiche of Romantic-era landscape painting.

But were it not so steeped in irony it would be nothing more than an impressive reproduction of a John Martin or an Arnold Böcklin. Lloyd, still thinking about time and timelessness has included, above the mountains, a miniscule aeroplane. It is so far in the distance, and flying at such altitude that it would be almost invisible, were it not for the long jet stream left in its wake, that stretches from the plane's position at top left of the surface area, deep into the centre of the work. The plane tells us that we are not looking at a mountain range at any point in the distant past or, most likely, any point in the distant future. The time is now. That the plane is so microscopically dwarfed by the mountains is something of a Romantic conceit, as is the stunning beauty of the mountain range. As a contemporary, Post-Romantic, Lloyd is more interested in challenging our perceptions, and in harnessing our post-September 11 anxieties. Through all this sheer, succulent beauty we cannot help but worry. Are

'There should be an empathy for the image within each brushstroke'

the snow caps melting? (yes, they are). Will the plane crash into the mountain? Innocent viewing pleasure is a luxury we can no longer afford.

The aeroplane also serves to reinforce the Post-Modernism of the work. The mountains, once the domain of the sublime, are now, for Lloyd, symbolic of another era. They are no longer beyond our reach – as was the sublime. We now access them with ease. What was, from ground level, awe-inspiring and spectacular is, from above, merely a corrugation of the earth's surface. That the image was sourced from *Das Deutsche Lichtbild* – a book of 1920s German photography – merely compounds the sublime as a phenomenon well within our reach.

The palpable excitement of Tony Lloyd's art practice is evident throughout his ten years plus as a practicing artist. He believes 'an artist should always be excited about making art', and has consistently

challenged himself and his audiences in attainment of this dictum. 'There should be empathy for the image within each brushstroke, which will make the whole picture exciting'. Lloyd's ceaseless fascination for the world is our win; while we may recognise places and spaces that we routinely inhabit, after our first encounter with Tony Lloyd's painting we will never look at them the same way again.

Simon Gregg
Curator

PAGE 24

Cat. 40
Tomorrow follows yesterday [detail]
2008

PAGE 25

Cat. 40
Tomorrow follows yesterday 2008

PAGES 26-27

Cat. 22
Give me just a little more time 2008

Cat. 39
We have all the time in the world 2008









Lost Highways

List of works

Cat. 1
Nowhere 1998
oil on linen
40 x 61cm
Collection of the artist



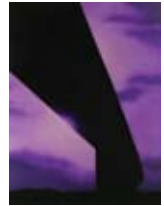
Cat. 3
Skystone 2004
oil on canvas
90 x 150cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 2
Westgate 2005
oil on linen
30 x 28cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 4
Monolith 2004
oil on canvas
150 x 90cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 5
Woodlands 2001
oil on canvas
70 x 200cm
Private Collection



Cat. 6
Night drive (blue)
2002
oil on linen
30 x 66cm
Private Collection



Cat. 7
Deep in the woods
2002
oil on canvas
70 x 200cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 8
Dissolving shadow
2002
oil on canvas
70 x 150cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 9
Myriad 2002
oil on canvas
70 x 150cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 10
Slip Stream 2004
oil on canvas
60 x 80cm
Private Collection



Cat. 11
Route 13 2006
oil on linen
46 x 61cm
Private Collection



Cat. 12
Silver 2004
oil on canvas
81 x 61cm
Collection of Virginia
Dahlenburg



Cat. 13
Lost weekend 2006
oil on linen
30 x 40cm
Private Collection



Cat. 14
Fever 2006-2009
oil on linen
70 x 60cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 15
I'm almost with you
2006
oil on canvas
31 x 28cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 16
*On a dark night you
can see forever* 2008
oil on canvas
66 x 166cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 17
Mist 2004
oil on canvas
80 x 60cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 18
Medusa 2006
oil on linen
60 x 66cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 19
Eternity 2004
oil on canvas
80 x 60cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 20
Some velvet morning
2004
oil on canvas
80 x 60cm
Private Collection



Cat. 21
Lux aeterna 2004
oil on canvas
150 x 280cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 22
Give me just a little more time 2008
oil on linen
100 x 280cm
Private Collection



Cat. 23
I double double dare you to love me 2008
oil on linen
66 x 183cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 24
Balck sun 2008
oil on linen
92 x 121cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 25
Eclipse 2008
oil on linen
91 x 122cm
Collection of Virginia Dahlenburg



Cat. 26
Nocturne 2006
oil on linen
30 x 40cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 27
Barkers Road 2006
oil on linen
25 x 23cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 28
A short history of lost time 2006
33 panel polyptych on canvas
Dimensions variable
Collection Gadens Lawyers, Sydney



Cat. 29
Asylum 2006
oil on linen
30 x 40cm
Private Collection



Cat. 30
Shadowmaker 2006
oil on linen
30 x 40cm
Collection of Rosita Trinca



Cat. 31
Distant Relations
2008
oil on linen
30 x 40cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 32
Remember me 2008
oil on linen
23 x 30cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 33
The invention of history 2008
oil on linen
23 x 30cm
Private Collection



Cat. 34
Return of the Gods
2008
oil on linen
23 x 30cm
Collection of Simon Carver



Cat. 35
Subliminal message
2008
oil on linen
23 x 30cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 36
One million years
2006
oil on linen
30 x 40cm
Private Collection



Cat. 37
Slow motion 2006
oil on linen
30 x 30cm
Collection of the artist



Cat. 38
Year zero 2007
oil on linen
41 x 41cm
Private Collection



Cat. 39
We have all the time in the world 2008
oil on canvas
100 x 280cm
Private Collection



Cat. 40
Tomorrow follows yesterday 2008
oil on linen
95 x 240cm
Collection Gippsland Art Gallery, Sale



TONY LLOYD
Lost Highways

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