

# Richard Lewer

## *Leaving Northcote*

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2 – 20 August 2022

Jan Murphy Gallery is excited to present *Leaving Northcote* our first solo exhibition with Melbourne-based artist Richard Lewer.

This new collection of paintings by Lewer was made after two years of being confined to his Northcote studio during Melbourne's COVID lockdown; when he travelled North for a residency at Tweed Regional Gallery, in the rainforest region of Northern NSW.

Lewer's practice is one of immersion, reaction and response to his environment: in the first week of his stay there was a fatal shark attack at Little Bay in Sydney, and in the last week he was evacuated in order to avoid the severe Northern NSW floods. When he left, the region was under water, it had rained for 14 days and 14 nights. Biblical references are often woven into Lewer's work and like fellow New Zealander Colin McCahon, he uses these inherited signs and symbols to communicate his own, and universal stories.

The monumental painting *I will need an ark* places us in the Tweed Valley's distinct volcanic landscape, formed through an ancient eruption and an area of great significance to the Bundjalung people. Koalas, dingoes and cassowaries line up to board the ark, cockatoos and magpies circle in the sky above. The painting conveys a distinct uneasiness, and reflects on a world in the grips of a climate crisis, a world where once extraordinary events are more and more commonplace and where a devastated and fragile earth is at odds with its human occupants. The figure at the centre of the painting is all of us, all partly to blame, part of the same flawed system.

The paintings combine multiple narratives: historical and mythological, personal stories and memories and depict both current events and premonitions. The moon and sun appear frequently, washing the canvases with light and solemnly marking the passing of days.

While at Murwillumbah, Lewer developed a new way of painting; applying large areas of paint in watery stains on the front and reverse of the canvas. This embeds the pigment in the canvas making it resistant to alteration. There is no scrubbing back, painting over or building on residue, as has been the case in the past. Instead he has instilled a sense of lightness, chance, signalling to the unknown consequences of our actions.

### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Lewer studied at the Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland, before completing his Masters at the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne. He has been awarded significant prizes including the Paul Guest Prize for Drawing (2020), Basil Sellers Art Prize (2016), Blake Prize (2014), National Works on Paper Drawing Award (2010), and the Wallace Art Award (2008). He has exhibited extensively in Australia and New Zealand including two survey exhibitions, *I Must Learn To Like Myself* at the Waikato Museum of New Zealand (2010) and *Nobody Likes a Show-Off* at Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne (2009). His work is represented in major public collections including the National Gallery of Australia, Art Gallery of New South Wales, National Gallery of Victoria, Art Gallery of South Australia and Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.