

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WILLIAM MACKINNON: STRIVE FOR THE LIGHT



20 OCTOBER – 20 NOVEMBER 2020
PRIVATE VIEW: TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER, 2 – 8 PM
SIMON LEE GALLERY, LONDON

Simon Lee Gallery is pleased to present *Strive for the light*, an exhibition of new paintings by Australian artist William Mackinnon, his first solo show in the UK. In this latest body of work, Mackinnon reflects on memories of trees in and around his family farm in western Victoria, Australia, and on formative experiences living in remote indigenous communities in the Kimberley region. Painted during a period of prolonged isolation as a result of lockdown, the symbol of the tree is imbued with a deep sense of longing for home, family, regrowth and regeneration.

Mackinnon's 'psychological landscape' paintings, as the artist refers to them, predominately portray Australian landscapes and are vast in manners both terrestrial and emotional. Interweaving personal and cultural histories, his work absorbs the intensity of our present circumstances and ultimately seeks to convey how it feels to be alive in the world today. Trees and roads, recurring motifs in Mackinnon's work, dominate scenes constructed from memory, while minute details, such as cracks in roads, potholes, roots and termite mounds, become stand ins for tumultuous emotional states. Movement and displacement abound in his pictures, conveying a sense of temporal urgency.

Throughout the exhibition, large paintings, made from acrylic, oil and enamel on linen (and a touch of glitter), present ancient, expansive trees in sparse, near barren settings, revealing Mackinnon's painterly invention in his interpretation of Australia's desert country. Knotted trunks and branches recall the the familiar and iconic river red gums of his childhood: a tree that is endemic to Australia. The smooth white or cream-coloured bark and lance-shaped or curved leaves, provide much needed shelter from harsh sun temperatures, while acting here as symbols for unique family dynamics, with each branch competing for light and finding space to grow. Earthen tones of saffron and umber are used to depict sun-scorched, near desolate landscapes, while the articulation of the trees themselves frame bleached backgrounds and far-off horizon lines, revealing a desire for regrowth and regeneration.

Darkness permeates many of Mackinnon's paintings, and nocturnal car rides and dreamlike scenes, such as *Same bed different dreams*, are representative of his idiosyncratic style, revealing a passion for adventure. Ultimately, Mackinnon's work plays on oppositions: light and darkness; comfort and threat; that which is deeply personal, yet profoundly universal. His large scale paintings alternately inspire feelings of anxiety and calm, an interplay that at

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once draws the viewer in and pushes them out. Imposing trees and vast landscapes are simultaneously welcoming and menacing, revealing on the one hand feelings of remoteness and abandonment – as seen in paintings such as *Uprooted* – while on the other, the intimacy and domesticity of family life, as in *Learning to love the wind* and *Keep it in the family*.

NOTES TO EDITORS

About William Mackinnon

William Mackinnon was born in 1978 in Melbourne, Australia and lives and works between Ibiza, UK and Australia. He received a BFA from Melbourne University, Melbourne, Australia in 2000 and MFAs from Chelsea School of Art and Design, London, UK in 2006 and Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, Australia in 2008. He has received numerous awards and recognitions, including the Australia Council Grant in 2010. Recent solo exhibitions include *Learning to love the wind*, Hugo Michell Gallery, Adelaide, Australia (2020); *Phoenix*, Art Projects Ibiza, Ibiza, Spain (2019); *The Lucky Country*, Hugo Michell Gallery, Adelaide, Australia (2018); *Psychological Landscapes*, Jan Murphy Gallery, Brisbane, Australia (2016); *Paintings conceived while driving*, Horsham Regional Art Gallery, Victoria, Australia (2013) and *Internal Weather*, Morton Fine Art, Washington DC (2012). Group exhibitions include *2017 Triennial*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia (2017); *Landscape of longing*, Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, Victoria, Australia (2013); *The Painting Group*, Milani Gallery, Brisbane, Australia (2011) and *Chase*, Royal College of Art, London, UK (2006). His work belongs to private and public collections including National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia; Ian Potter Museum Collection, Melbourne, Australia; Gold Coast City Art Gallery, Queensland, Australia and Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra, Australia.

About Simon Lee Gallery

Founded in London in 2002, Simon Lee Gallery represents artists of diverse generations whose practices explore a wide range of media, from sculpture and painting to video and photography, and who share a broad interest in an exploration of the conceptual. Aiming to provide a significant international audience for its artists, the gallery also regularly punctuates its programme with historical exhibitions and curated group shows, which present shifts in contemporary art practice and thought, whilst broadening the dialogue with artists outside of the gallery's core programme. In addition to its UK activity, in 2012 the gallery opened a space in Hong Kong, which introduced its artists to a wider public in Asia, with a fully independent programme. In 2014, Simon Lee Gallery opened an office and private viewing space in New York. In 2017, this space was re-launched with a year-round programme of exhibitions and events, showcasing the work of emerging and established artists in dynamic group and solo exhibitions.

Visiting Simon Lee Gallery

Simon Lee Gallery's focus is first and foremost on protecting our visitor's health and wellbeing as you visit the gallery. As such, we have implemented a booking system to ensure that social distancing is safely exercised at all times. Please visit our website or email info@simonleegallery.com to reserve a time to attend the private view event or, to visit the gallery throughout the duration of the exhibition.

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter: @SimonLeeGallery
www.simonleegallery.com

Image: William Mackinnon, *The legacy large family*, 2020, Acrylic oil and automotive enamel on linen, 220 x 320 cm (86 5/8 x 126 in.). Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery.

For further press information, images and requests please contact Julia Kelly Kennedy: julia@simonleegallery.com / +44 (0) 207 491 0100.

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