

CAIRNS
ART
GALLERY

1 JUN –
25 AUG 2024

RYAN PRESLEY
MONGREL

LIST OF WORKS

Ryan PRESLEY

b. 1987, Alice Springs, Northern Territory
Marri Ngarr

Ozy, Ozy, Ozy I

2023

oil on polyester

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Urging victory in sport, the colloquial 'Aussie, Aussie, Aussie' sounds just like 'Ozy'. But highlighting a collision of cultures the artist has in mind a sonnet, Ozymandias by English Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. In ancient Greek, Ozymandias was the name of an Egyptian pharaoh, and Shelley's poem describes how as aeons pass, even the most powerful rulers and their legacies are consigned to oblivion. The disintegrating statute of an antique lion exists on a plinth beside a snarling dingo amid symbols of broken empires, a satellite and displaced Sacred Ibis. A meditation on ruin in the wake of all things passing.

The sun never sets; so we daydream I

2023

oil and gold leaf on polyester

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

A looming dark sun with concentric half circles of lighter lines intersect with the trajectory of the moon moving across its surface. With an aura of flames around her head an Aboriginal woman radiates tender humanity as she feeds a baby and cradles a small dog. Sand dunes and blue waves dance in patterns across the surface, supporting dolphins (one wounded), clouds, a service station, lighthouse and a ship carrying tanks. This existential narrative suggests that nature, culture and industry are interchangeable, and that deep time remains an enigma at the core.

Wasteland I

2024

oil on polyester

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Wasteland II

2024

oil on polyester

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Fixed to one central viewing point, an observer aiming to discern a desert horizon sees a blur. Landscape markers are merely the solitary palm and insistent clouds. Unsettling in their refusal to render more, *Wasteland I* and *II* seem instead to offer a way of bearing witness to the passing of time and the reality of loss.

Blue field (hood) III

2024

oil on polyester

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Blue field (hood) IV

2024

oil on polyester

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Blue field (hood) V

2024

oil on polyester

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Blue field (hood) VI

2024

oil on polyester

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Four paintings in the *Field* series capture lights set in churning dark movements of vapour. Are these cosmic stars-capes, or hugely enlarged motes within the eye? The title 'Field' also names the strand of American abstraction that arose more than sixty years ago, which for a period dominated European movements in western art history. The Field bore ideological claims of liberty and freedom. The artist's layered meanings questions these claims as so many distorted visions.

Wandering hearts I

2024

watercolour on Arches paper

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Wandering minds I

2024

watercolour on Arches paper

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

The companion works *Wandering Hearts* and *Wandering Minds* draw on the transit of Venus appearing as a small disc with lunar movements travelling across the Sun. In June 1769 navigator Captain James Cook and astronomer Charles Green tracked and recorded this phenomenon, which repeats every 243 years. The artist's observations in re-recording the transit interweaves human hearts and minds with science, mysticism, omen and cataclysm. Cook's 'secret' mission that followed his scientific voyage included exploring the South Pacific to find the legendary Terra Australia Incognita.

Daydreamer I

2024

pencil on Arches paper
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Daydreamer II

2024

pencil on Arches paper
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Daydreamer III

2024

pencil on Arches paper
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Daydreamer IV

2024

pencil on Arches paper
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

The *Daydreamer* series (I–IV) substitutes an Indigenous hero for Adonis, the Greek god of love and desire. Adonis was also a great hunter, and in the myth a goddess jealous of his hunting skills sent a wild boar to overpower him as Adonis bled to death. Rendered with delicate precision in muted tones, Presley's hunter does battle with a feral pig. In *Daydreamer IV* the realism of a rifle at his side again clashes with mythology as the Indigenous protagonist is obliged to battle invasive species. Daydreams of conquest among classical allusions.

Ozy, Ozy, Ozy (blue prelude)

2024

pencil on Arches paper
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Lucid dream (blue coda) I

2024

pencil on Arches paper
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Two dogs (perhaps mongrels) defend a third against a pouncing boar of the feral pig variety. This lucid dream muses on the aristocratic practices of hunting, philosophy and art. In composition and style, the Dutch Golden Age is evoked, when animals were often used as an allegory for a society structured on class and hierarchy. The artist's dream in tender blue seems to project the fragility of 'the natural order' via a colonial trope.