



# pushing the boundaries

An illuminated journey beneath the ecology of Tony Lloyd's paintings

Words Simon Carver

A sentimental longing for nostalgic escapism of a distant past? Perhaps a serious exercise in the equivocal challenges the Earth's ecosystems face in a changing world?

These were some of the questions I first pondered when a chance meeting with Tony Lloyd took place mid-2008 at the Nellie Castan Gallery in South Yarra.

The road has always provided artists with an irresistible metaphor in which to provoke an allegorical response. Weather in the form of analogy, metaphor or reality, the road both mesmerises and evokes the unknown, the uncertain and beyond. As a journey or an adventure, the road is both the beginning and the end of a memory. Writers and filmmakers have been seducing their audience for years with the road parable.

David Lynch's *Lost Highway* both seduces and haunts in its use of narrative, technique and, in particular, its film noir style and works such as Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* have somewhat "rite of passage" resonance with devotees of the external light.

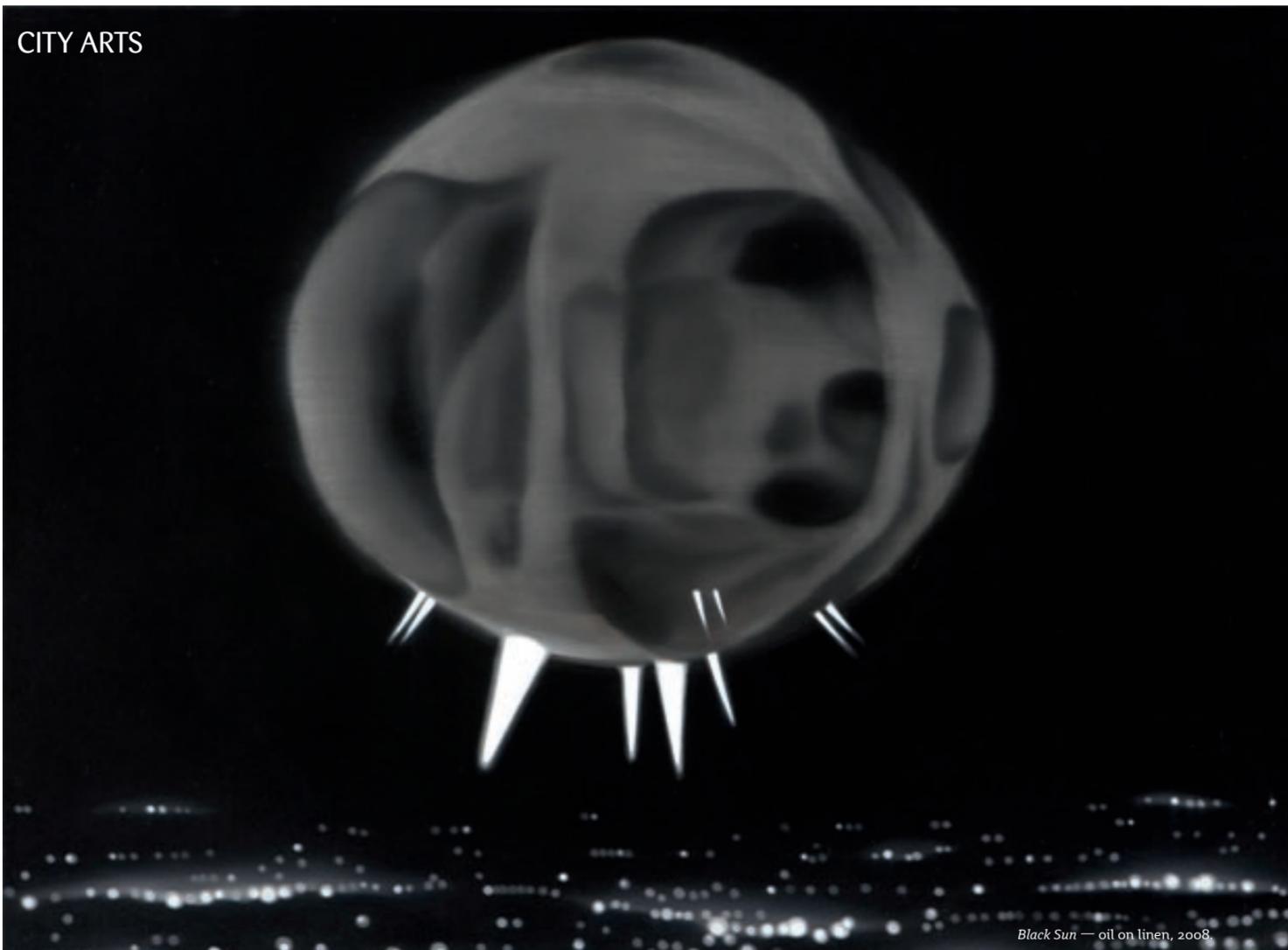
Tony Lloyd understands the fascination of the journey and the road we must travel to help the journey echo our everyday lives. Working predominately in an Australian context, Lloyd's paintings over the past

10 years have focused essentially in the landscape oeuvre of painting. Influenced by some of the great European masters such as Caravaggio and Caspar David Friedrich, Lloyd's work is both romantic and haunting.

"In Caravaggio's work there is such a dynamic balance between dark and light. The extreme tonal contrast is electrifying and it's that formal aspect that I take from his paintings. The locations I depict in my work, whether it is landscape, a road or whatever, are only half the story. The lighting and the time of day are what bring the image to life. Furthermore, I am fascinated and humbled by the work of Casper David Friedrich. He is the greatest romantic landscape painter of our century; he is the master of allegory and I admire the way his paintings evoke feelings that are impossible to put into words," says Lloyd.

Cathartic is a word that struck me when I first observed Tony Lloyd's works. The paintings' enigmatic titles such as *Curious Incident* and *Traveller — The Road Is Your Footsteps, Nothing More* all read like storyboards into a film where beauty and fragility seem somewhat perilously close. The brevity of the works of mountains, small scenes from sci-fi movies and strange landscapes with UFOs hovering above them beguiled me as I meandered through the gallery, these iconic images taking me

Above Ipsum lorem amo amare et tu brutus



Black Sun — oil on linen, 2008

“The painter depicts not what he sees before him, but what he sees within him.”  
*Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* by Joseph Leo Koerner, 1990, Reaktion Books Ltd.

deep into my subconscious — a feeling I am sure the great explorers must feel when discovering a new mountain or passage through a deep ravine.

*Give Me Just A Little More Time* particularly resonated with me throughout my time in the space. Given our frequent fascination with the natural world and the allure of a distant past, the wonder and belief in our environment never seems to diminish. Lloyd’s recurring images of mountains and roads naturally have universal metaphors. If the viewer is willing to put time into thinking about these paintings, they will find the

works both literal and figurative. Lloyd’s hope is his works offer the viewer alternative viewing points, something he admires in allegorical painting in general.

“I like to choose images that have some type of archetypal resonance. The image of a country highway is something that endlessly fascinates me; it’s a way of putting the contrast between the natural and constructed worlds into perspective, but it also taps into narrative archetypes — from the odyssey through to road movies. The mountains with jet vapour trails put human endeavours and nature into perspective, but they also depict a contrast between the fleeting eternal and at this particular point in time. It’s difficult not to think of carbon emissions and global warming when presented with exhaust and ice,” says Lloyd.

Armed with a digital camera, Lloyd spends many hours collecting images on the open roads of Australia, aimlessly driving the less-travelled ones. Usually capturing images in the quiet of the early morning or at dusk, the mystery of the open road and what lies beyond the horizon is crucial in the articulation of many of Lloyd’s works of art.

“I use Photoshop a lot in the planning

stages of a painting and often I collage different images into a single perspective. I have worked with video in the past and the slight blur effect I employ is an aesthetic device that comes from still video frames. I am constantly trying to solve the problem of how to find exactly the sort of image I want; using video is a way to capture both the experience of driving through forests at night and having a cinematic look to the work. Lately I’ve been looking for the perfect image of a mountain. I bought a lot of books on mountains in Europe but I still didn’t find what I wanted, so I made the decision to only work from my own photographs. It was then that I began thinking about film again and the way filmmakers solve the problem of finding the perfect location.”

The need to capture the perfect Mountain leads to making model mountains and landscapes from plaster, the process Lloyd describes as being a bit “old school special effects”. By articulating an artificial landscape in a man-made environment, Lloyd can light these models exactly the way he wants and then photograph them. The final piece of the puzzle is the combination of the fictional landscape and actual photos using Photoshop.



The carefully constructed images collected from Lloyd’s various road trips are then manipulated in his studio and projected or sometimes hand-drawn directly onto the canvas.

Using the paint like a pencil or, for the larger images, a grid to formulate the composition, a dry fan brush then creates the smooth images with a slightly blurred effect. To the untrained eye, some would think the paintings were airbrushed.

Lloyd’s inky, often absurd images are derived from recorded moments in time. Like classic film noir, the moody, dark, richly glazed canvases are manipulated in his studio. His studio represents a 1960s film studio, with some works looking like experiments into the alien genre of filmmaking. Although not a huge consideration, the limited colour palette

unifies the images and subject matter behind the works.

“I liked the elegance and simplicity of a pared back palette and Prussian blue and deep red oxide work very well together in a single work or in a room of several paintings. Having a particular caste that all my paintings are in is also a way of being able to unite a diverse range of imagery. It creates a mood and a parallel world,” explains Lloyd.

Artists have long drawn inspiration from nature, as well as being advocates for a sustainable relationship between humanity and the environment. While the need for urgent, even radical change has become broadly accepted in order to achieve a sustainable environment, the paths we take remain complex and unclear. The role artists such as Tony Lloyd play provide us with points of departure to articulate and help

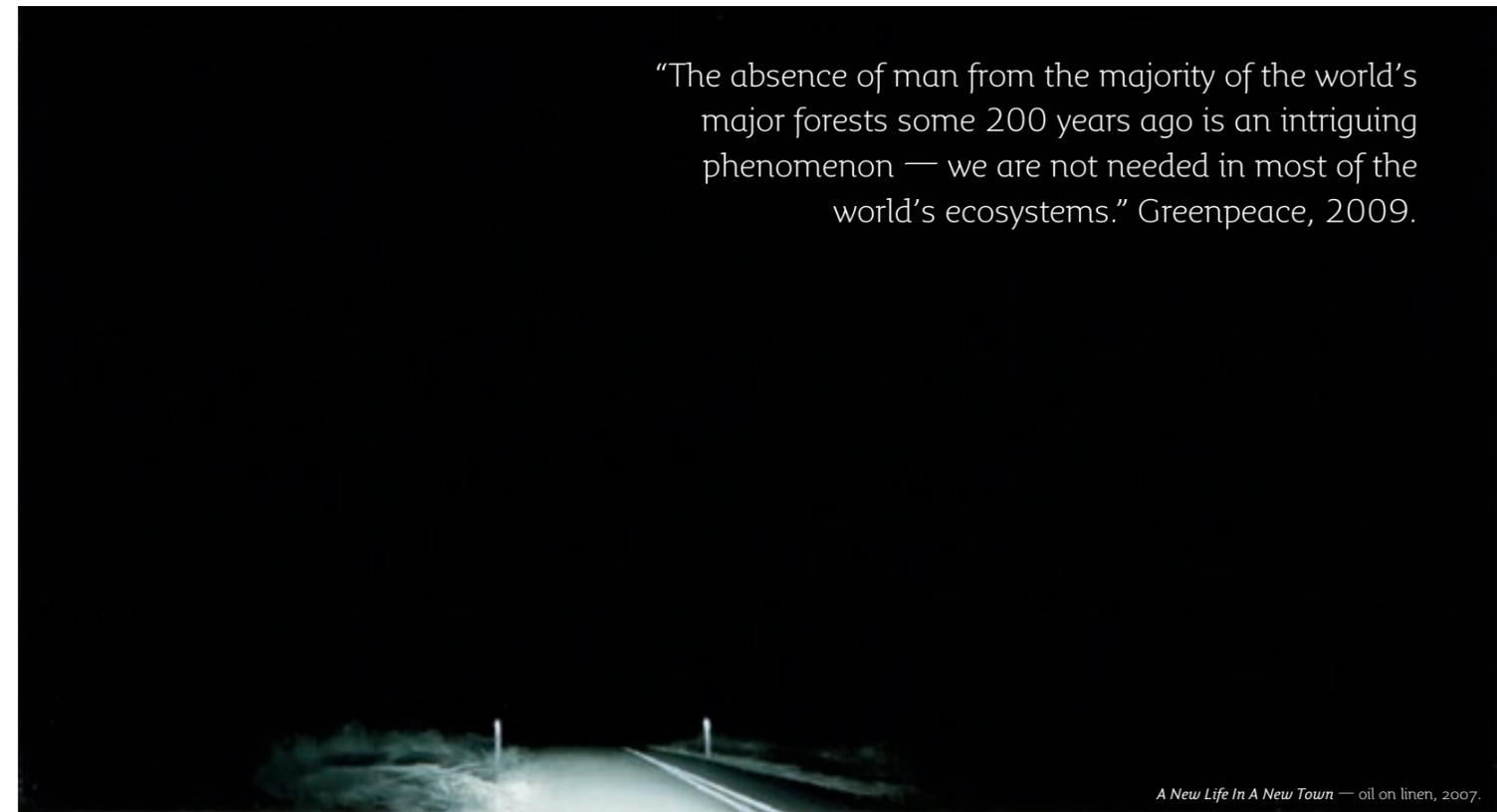
create a thought process via the beauty and illuminated reference points in works of art.

What is the role of art? Art shapes and offers a lens through which we can view the world. It provides models and modes of metaphorical thinking that can sharpen our perception of the relation between complex parts and their impact on a dynamic whole.

Lloyd’s work pushes these very boundaries, the fine line we tread and the juxtaposition between our constructed and natural worlds. His work is not to create an answer, but to question our perception of what we take for granted and what our belief systems truly are.

*Tony Lloyd’s work can be seen in a retrospective show of the past 10 years at Gippsland Art Gallery in Sale from September to November.*

“The absence of man from the majority of the world’s major forests some 200 years ago is an intriguing phenomenon — we are not needed in most of the world’s ecosystems.” Greenpeace, 2009.



A New Life In A New Town — oil on linen, 2007