

Tony Lloyd's glacial mountainscapes share an affinity with those of Jason Cordero, but he takes a more calculated approach. His paintings have a sense of time frozen, and haunt us through their penetrating ambiguity, speaking of nowhere and of no-when. Lloyd's evolving practice addresses a variety of themes, while remaining loyal to a unique and singular vision. From arcane highways at night and urbanity steeped in peril (which we will explore in Chapter 9), his oeuvre has progressed into the deeply unfathomable, and explores some of the greater philosophical and spiritual problems we face today. His works culminate in massive, sweeping panoramas that engage the Romantic sublime, but also deny any specific influence. They are at once uncannily familiar and strangely elusive.

Lloyd began painting mountains in 2007, sourced from a book of early German photography. From these tiny black and white images, Lloyd has produced huge canvases measuring up to 100 × 280 cm, that retain something of their original monochromatic nature, painted in blue, white and grey. Actual first-hand experience of these mountains is not important for Lloyd, only that they impart the idea of mountains – a subject traditionally associated with the Sublime.

These majestic paintings first found form during an artist residency in Rome, where Lloyd was 'surrounded by things that were 2,000 years old, daily'; and 'timelessness became a reality'.¹⁹ Following this experience, in which he was made acutely aware of his place in time, Lloyd undertook to recreate that sense of our microcosmic existence, and of the infinity of time. One of the



Tony LLOYD
*We've Got All the
Time in the World*
2008
oil on canvas
100 × 280 cm



Tony LLOYD, *Tomorrow Follows Yesterday*, 2008, oil on canvas, 95 × 240 cm, Gippsland Art Gallery, Sale

works to come out of this experience was *We've Got All the Time in the World* (2008), which seems to suggest just that. Here, we are presented with a monumental and elemental range of snow-capped mountains painted almost entirely in Prussian blue, with a soft blurring that pays homage to Gerhard Richter (1932–). Like Lloyd, Richter was to be profoundly moved by the Romantic condition, and produced works that strongly recalled Friedrich's vacant mysticism.

In composition and subject matter, *Tomorrow Follows Yesterday* (2008) is a direct pastiche of Romantic-era landscape painting. But were it not so steeped in irony, it would be nothing more than an accomplished reproduction of a work by Friedrich, such as *High Mountains* (1824). An essential difference here is that while Friedrich places his glacial mountains out of reach, forever unattainable beyond a mist-filled abyss, Lloyd almost invites us to ascend his. Indeed, we are led, at the work's foreground, to follow the footsteps of an intrepid explorer before us, who has presumably found a means of traversing the vertiginous range.

Lloyd has somewhat disingenuously used the expression 'Super-Romantic' to describe this work.²⁰ To be sure, his examples of it are abundantly rich in sublimity, and they facilitate a meditation on the grandiosity of nature, but they are not transcendent; they are not so much a window into another world, as a carefully

framed view of the empirical world. While referencing the idea of the unattainable mountain peak, as Friedrich did before him, Lloyd counters any assumption of a sublime force at work. He seeks instead to convey something of the essence of this natural structure, in a way that recalls William Delafield Cook's work of the 1970s; where Delafield Cook painted a hedge, it was the



Caspar David FRIEDRICH, *High Mountains*, 1824, oil on canvas, 132 × 167 cm, formerly Nationalgalerie, Berlin (destroyed)



Tony LLOYD, *Give Me Just a Little More Time*, 2008, oil on canvas, 100 × 280 cm

'hedge-ness of the hedge' that he sought.²¹ So it is with Lloyd, who elucidates the 'mountain-ness of a mountain'. These works assert that we can only assume the existence of that which can be perceived. Accordingly, Lloyd's mountains shatter the illusion of the sublime, and reveal the majestic as being merely an effect of language.

A further conceit to the contemporary nature of Lloyd's mountains can be found in the inclusion of a stratospheric 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. The plane tells us that we are not looking at a mountain range at any point in the distant past or, most likely, at any point in the distant future. In spite of his appeal to timelessness, borne out in his perpetuation of Romanticism's nostalgia for the infinite, Lloyd constantly takes us to the brink of sublimity before retreating. The aeroplane, then, serves to reinforce the Post-Modernism of the work. The mountains, once the exclusive domain of the sublime, are now symbolic of another era. They are no longer beyond our reach – as was the sublime – but are accessed with ease. What was, from ground level, awe-inspiring and spectacular is, from above, merely a corrugation of the earth's surface. In this single work, Lloyd

surmises the dilemma faced by Neo-Romantic artists: how to untangle a pictorial idiom inherited from two hundred years ago in a world where apparently nothing is beyond our reach?

Lloyd ups the stakes in *Give Me Just a Little More Time* (2008), which in title as well as intent seems to plead for a return to the ungraspable and the timeless in art. If the aeroplane in *Tomorrow Follows Yesterday* humanised the inhuman, then here, in this monumental precipice in monochrome, the natural disorder of the cosmos is restored. In place of the humble aeroplane, we are presented with an airborne visitor infinitely more arcane: a speeding metallic UFO. In its simple, commonplace appearance, the UFO seems strangely innocuous, as if a sublime mountainscape should naturally attract visitors from other planets. The mysticism here is heightened, upon closer inspection, by the apparent presence of a pyramid cresting the summit of a lower mountain peak. Lloyd re-establishes the sublimity of the mountain, robbed by mankind's growing supremacy over nature, by literally asserting its fundamental supernature.

The motif of the aeroplane reappears in the work of Adelaide artist Mark Kimber, but to very different ends. In his series of six photomontage works, *Fictive Landscapes* (2006), Kimber constructs a fantastical homage to Romanticism. Asked if he sees

muted and measured. His subjects fill the picture surface; they represent a captured moment of heightened drama, or more commonly, an indifferent moment made dramatic through the employment of radical visual devices.

The road and the highway at night are recurring motifs through Tony Lloyd's oeuvre, where darkness becomes a looming, untenable force holding unknown terrors. The figurative detail in many of his works is compressed into small pockets of incandescent illumination, with much of the picture surface given over to opaque fields of black. With the merest suggestion, Lloyd is able to describe an entire scene that is otherwise concealed from view. In *Woodlands* (2001), we observe this fascination played out: a long, straight road is lit blurrily by speeding car headlights. The forestry and darkness loom on either side with impossible benevolence, which is at once drawn entirely from empirical observation. This is a scene that confronts many people nightly, but here it becomes the climax of a gripping drama. Like much of Lloyd's output, the work has cinematic references beyond its basis in his own personal memory.

In later works such as *Dissolving Shadows* (2002) and *Deep in the Woods* (2002), the lines of the road seem to be leading us into an abyss of cosmic disturbance. A hypnotic light floods the scenes with a supernatural luminosity, and the commonplace again becomes a mysterious theatre of paranormal activity. This, as we have seen earlier, has sometimes manifest explicitly in Lloyd's work in subjects such as UFOs and pyramids, but here in the dense shrouds of forestry, the alien presence is kept at bay.

On other occasions, such as *Fever* (2006–09), Lloyd is careful to omit anything but the merest suggestion of disturbance. The work, in which a monochrome roadway sits quietly in the bottom right corner of the canvas, was completed in 2006 with a strange red radiation glowing in the top left corner. Lloyd returned to the work three years later and removed the red glow, which has had the effect of increasing the sinister intensity of the bleak roadway. The weight of the darkness above the corner of detail compresses the atmospheric tension, and so renders every particle of information with a heightened drama. We become acutely aware of the spindly branch that protrudes from the right

Tony Lloyd applies the tricks of Henson's and Lipp's cinematic half-light to his compelling oil paintings, where colours, details and forms can be manipulated even further. His painting practice expresses an exhilarating and cinematic world view, where subjects range from vast, sublime mountainscapes – as we have already seen in Chapter 4 – to extremes of motion. But always present is his slick, filmic vision and an obsession with darkness and light. The nocturnal views are cropped, with details deliberately obscured or exaggerated, and colours carefully



Top to Bottom

Tony LLOYD,

Woodlands, 2001, oil on canvas, 70 × 200 cm

Dissolving Shadows, 2002, oil on canvas, 70 × 150 cm

Deep in the Woods, 2002, oil on canvas, 70 × 200 cm



edge, and the small reflective posts that watch like primitive eyes. The darkness which inhabits the majority of the picture becomes enriched by our powers of imagination.

Lloyd's attraction to the road stems from its symbolic potential. He notes: '[T]he road is such a fantastic metaphor for anything. Where you can only see what the headlights show, you have to imagine the rest.'¹⁹ In these twilight evocations of motorways, 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 emptied of people. While the presence of humans is implied, we are relieved of their company, which makes 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.



Above Tony LLOYD, *Fever*, 2006–09, oil on canvas, 70 × 60 cm

Below Tony LLOYD, *Myriad*, 2002, oil on canvas, 70 × 150 cm

On occasion, Lloyd bases his paintings on still images from films, such as *Asylum* (2006) and *Shadowmaker* (2006), which are based on *Night of the Hunter* (1955) and *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) respectively. The stills capture a frozen moment within a broader narrative, suggesting a kind of incoherent storyboard. There are events unfolding beyond our ability to fathom, and we cannot ascertain the complete storyline in which we are caught. In denying us the full narrative sequence, Lloyd's paintings are dislocated fragments without climax or closure. A tangible disquiet permeates, and we are reminded of Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (1979), which contained ten incomplete novel fragments – all distinct genres, all incomplete. The effect is of a constant state of delayed resolution and 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 makes more overt references to the Romantic in works such as *Some Velvet Morning* (2004) and *Eternity* (2004), which languidly recall Friedrich at his most transcendent. Here, the lush evocation of atmosphere and immaterially seem to transit a divine intervention, flooding the scene with a supernatural tranquillity. However, Lloyd is keen to add, as always, 'something ominous to temper any sentimental aura that they [the paintings] put out.'²⁰ We therefore witness a kind of pastoral tension, where the mediative 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 and we seek clarity, but are denied these things through the lulling intoxication of the picturesque. The climactic drama is in remission, and we gaze out through dreamy, half-closed eyes.

Tony Lloyd belongs decisively to the Post-Modern school of the sublime. He offers us tantalising snatches of sublimity, but because we know that they are clearly fragments of a greater whole – like stills from a film – we are never able to access the whole of that greater experience. For Lloyd, the sublime is a construct of language – a side-effect of communication. The sublime only exists in our attempts to give it credence. While

Lloyd acknowledges the history of the idea of the sublime in his work, he clearly delineates the attainable from the unattainable. He gives us views such as transcendental nocturnal experiences or encounters with majestic snow-capped mountains, but he always restores these sensations to the realm of the feasible. The eerie effects of light in the night are produced by our car headlights; and the mountain range is not merely within our grasp to comprehend, but it is within our means to overcome – as demonstrated by the aeroplanes that fly overhead.

Lloyd's paintings shatter the illusion of the sublime, and reveal the majestic as being a construct of our culture. Aesthetically, his paintings are often still – somnambulant even. But they are never peaceful. Lloyd finds disquiet and anxiety in the most serene of subjects. His forests seen from a speeding car window – a blur of twilight and foliage – are anything but calming. Instead, we image a perpetrator fleeing the scene of some terrible deed. The heart beats faster and we feel a rush of adrenalin. Something, somewhere, has gone terribly wrong.

