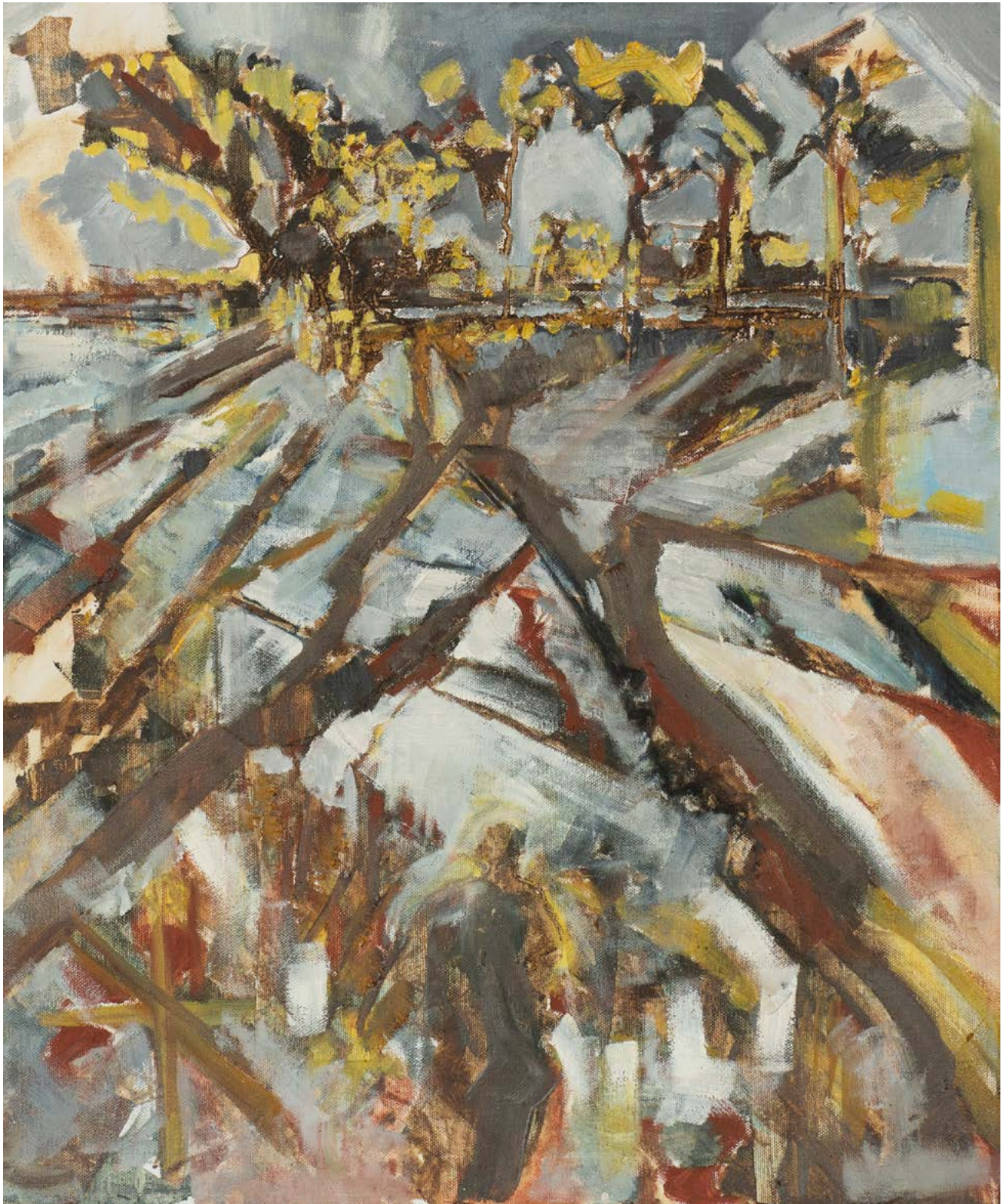


# Landscape, Existence

## Julien Playoust

4 to 27 April 2024 \_\_\_\_\_





A hunger for art is a constant in Julien Playoust's life. A passionate advocate of the centrality of art in life, he is a committed artist who brings a questioning spirit to his practice. Julien respects what has transpired before him artistically and thinks deeply about his subject matter. He is open to the newest ideas in contemporary art and concepts, but is guided by the pursuit of developing his skills and translating them into the best possible pictures he can produce.

This exhibition showcases early studies and influences, analysis of landscape, and the investigation of family life through portraiture.

Playoust's passion for the environment and respect for the Traditional Owners of our lands has worked its way into his approach to painting landscape – and how we treat it. He wants us to consider our impact on our surroundings.

That's why a considerable proportion of the exhibition is devoted to landscape and our place in it. "Landscape and existence are synonymous to me," he says. "They are both about living in time and place. How we live, and our struggles for existence. How we co-exist with ourselves, our family, our community, our environment."



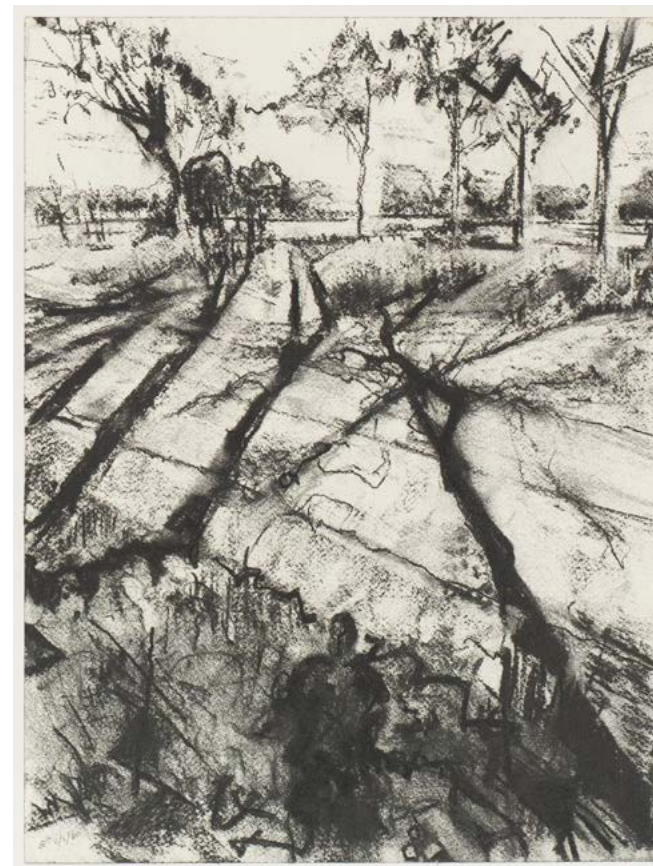
*Landscape, Existence 1 (Ghosts in the landscape), 2020-21, oil and charcoal on board, 40 x 60.5 cm*



*The Landscape Codex: 13. Sentinel: Dead wood overlooking our country in volatile times, I, 2022, oil, ink and encaustic wax on book-binders board, 34 x 46 cm*



*Landscape, Existence III, 2020-21, oil on board, 40 x 60.5 cm*



*Codex 1: Standing by the road, just out of Dalby, 2020, Charcoal and chalk on paper, 42 x 30 cm*

He lives in Sydney's Northern Beaches and also runs a property in rural Central West New South Wales, having grown up and lived on Wiradjuri Country. Between his stewardship of the land, looking after his shearers' livelihoods and the day-to-day management of the farm, he will often be found painting, documenting and examining human relationships to the landscape. Living between city and country, he is aware of our fragile connections to the world, and that's why the figure and the land are vital to his practice – they go hand in hand and this survey establishes this important aspect of his work. Some of his early landscape works remind me of the London bombsites that Frank Auerbach painted after World War II. They have qualities of the School of London about them, with wonderful empty spaces, gnarled sprawling forms, and grungy used-up paint.





Crutching I, 2020, charcoal and gouache on paper, 41 x 31 cm

There is an aggressive quality and destructive process to Julien's work. He takes on big subjects, scraping back and forth, adding and subtracting marks, and continually digging into the surface – finding a way through the image. This is something that I find admirable in his work. He is full of ambition and energy in both his life and his art, always involved in the world around him. Once he steps into his small studio, he is totally committed to the work in front of him. His enquiry and focus give his work a textural richness. For example, wild marks and brushstrokes echo the frenzied activity of the shearers in his woolshed series. The rhythms of his triptychs lead the viewer on narrative arcs that echoes the movements of the human figure. These are electric energies of the soul.

In his figurative works and portraits, there is an interrogation happening – of the subject, of his relationship to them, and also into how he can make an interesting work. One that will also surprise himself.



Yield another meal, the space between ambivalence & sustenance, 2021, oil on bookbinder's board, 60 x 42 cm



Mother landscape, 2021, oil on board, 40 x 30 cm



Remnants XII. The Watcher, 2022, conte crayon, sepia and gouache on paper, 26 x 36 cm

This exhibition is a testament to those uncompromising talents and his hard work ethic, which make it a really immersive experience. Each mark, approach, line and idea has been pushed to its limit. He's an artist that uses his skills in an interesting way and brings something new to the table each time. There is a glowing vibrancy of marks in his figurative works. He understands the importance of the background – and how it relates to the figure in the foreground.

He is influenced by Walter Sickert, Francis Bacon, Auerbach and Australian artists David

Fairbairn and Suzanne Archer. He has travelled widely, visited all the great galleries, including to see recent Sickert retrospectives in Europe, Philip Guston at the Tate Modern in London, and a Frans Hals exhibition at London's National Gallery. He also recently spent time visiting the great UK sculptor, Laurence Edwards – a poignant association, for both have an appreciation of the weight of humanity, our human footprint on the earth, and our place in the world. Something that all these artists share is an awareness of our own fragility.



Dad portrait, 17 July 2023, oil on canvas on board, 51 x 41 cm

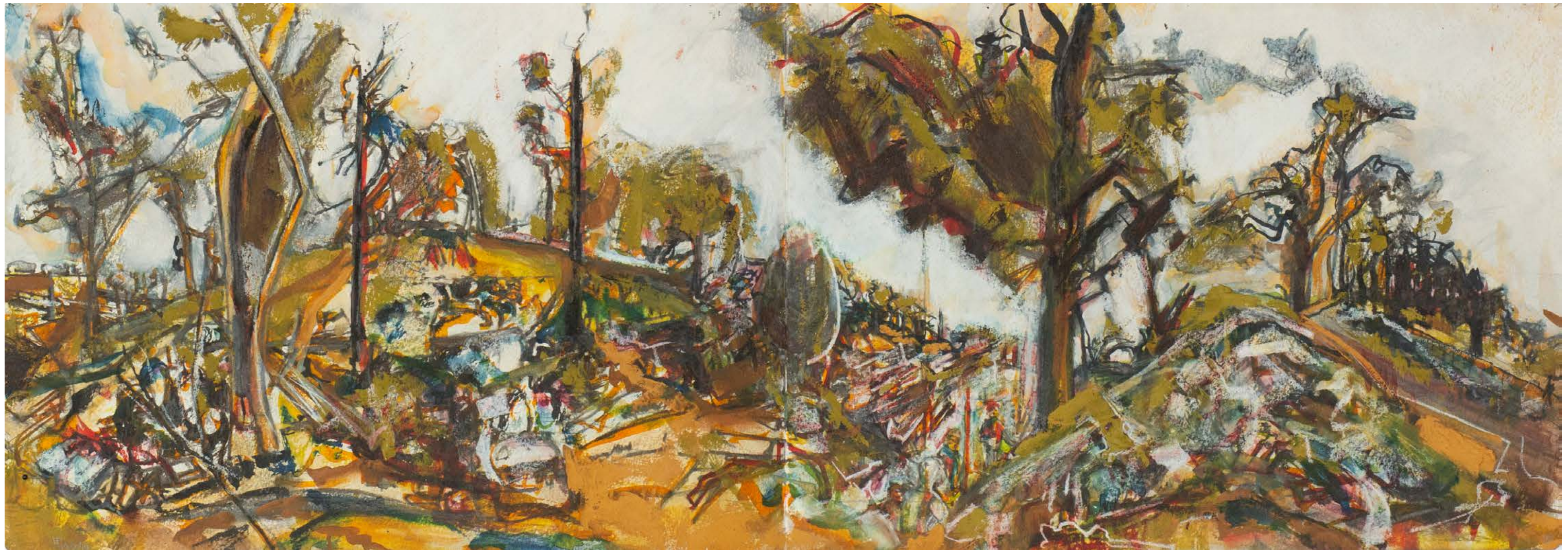


Father Interior (my dad) 2022-23, oil on canvas on ply, 58 x 48 cm

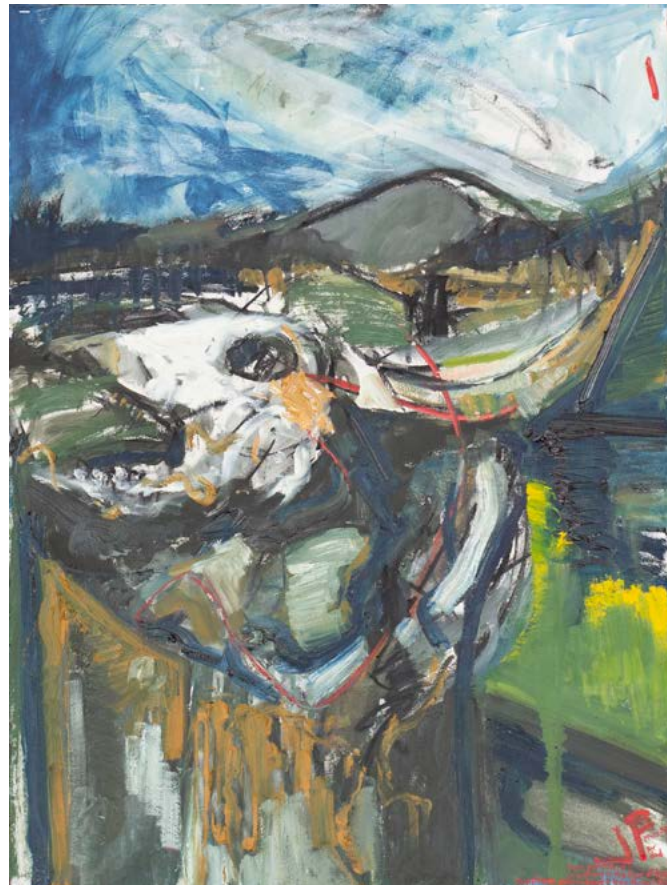


Drawing my dad: To day, 2023, charcoal on paper, 76 x 56 cm





*The Landscape Codex 5: Old man, family group and trees*, 2019, graphite, chalk, pastel, gouache, sepia and watercolour on paper, 30 x 84 cm



Playoust is not afraid to challenge the viewer or willing to compromise anything in his approach. Some of his later works might be considered 'in your face' or unconventional, but they are fascinating works that grow on you over time – the sign of good art. He and I have often argued over art and our preferences artistically, but often I will come away and take another look at an artwork on his recommendation and find something completely new that I never expected. This courageous approach to viewing art emanates from his own work.

Look closely and you will see the passionate build-up of marks, and his love and enjoyment in applying them. He is a real student of art with a vitality of mark making.

**Left:** *Bush parable #1: Laughing in the face of decay (Happiness goes to heaven thru those hills...)* 2023, oil and charcoal on Arches paper, 76 x 57 cm

Making sense of where he is located both politically and as an artist, Playoust thinks deeply about his surroundings. He is not afraid to challenge his situations in life, what is expected of him, his art and his studio practice. The development of his work is deliberate yet based on instinct. He is a force, using every waking minute in pushing forward for his family, work and art. A passionate supporter of other artists, he values his relationships with people.

Playoust bravely incorporates his relationships and struggles into his artistic process. Working through these relationships – especially one aspect, his ageing parents – as an artist he shows us inescapable truths and the progressions we all face. There are some very moving portraits in this exhibition, especially those showing the relationship between father and son. They are mysterious portraits of facing death head on, staring it down, and closure – very personal moments in time, captured in paint. Julien's work deals with the fragilities of our world in a compassionate way, he acknowledges traditions in art and life, and his hunger for knowledge and investigative qualities will continue to take him forward in his art.

**Steve Lopes**, February 2024



## Julien Playoust

After a lifelong passion and commitment for painting and art, over the last number of years, Playoust has established a dedicated studio practice, which has expanded into a permanent painting studio based in Sydney. His work focuses primarily on plein air and narrative studio painting. Working from preliminary sketches, memory and montages, his work explores themes of landscape and labour, and our common human experience - moments when we yield to our existence. His practice comes from a life-long discipline of drawing from life, reading, and researching the masters.

Playoust works on the lands of the Gamaragal clan of the Guringai people, and the Wiradjuri people of central west NSW.



*The Landscape Codex: 15. Four trees and a stump, 2019, charcoal and chalk on paper, 30 x 42 cm*

**Cover:** *Landscape II, 2021, Oil on canvas on board, 61 x 51 cm*

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*The Grace Cossington Smith Gallery respects and acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of this Land as the First People and Custodians of this country.*