



TONY LLOYD

STORY KENT WILSON
PHOTOGRAPHY SAM MIKKELSEN

Propulsion sits at the heart of Tony Lloyd's most recent suite of paintings, an apt force underlying both the content of his art and the trajectory of his career. Mountains rise into the clear blue sky, majestic and confident in their tectonic elevation, inching inexorably upward with sustained geological momentum. Roadways wind and stretch out before us, pulling us forward with a gravitational force. And so too, Lloyd's own place on the landscape of contemporary Australian art rises on the back of a consistently developing body of work that navigates its way through some very captivating terrain.



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Working with a determined discipline, Lloyd is “in the studio five days a week, eight to nine hours a day. I work in series and I let the work change in an evolutionary fashion.” Driven by a sense of exploration he enjoys working and the process of preparing his art to exhibit. “I love putting a show together, it’s like creating an articulate non-verbal expression of an inexpressible idea.”

It is the landscape, and particularly the human interaction with it, that underpins much of Lloyd’s work. *Slow Motion* is dominated by asphalt roads leading us through rural environments, of grey pathways illuminated by the headlights of a car, where the viewer is suddenly in the driver’s seat. We feel the road rushing toward us, passing under us, as if the world is rolling forward under our stationary bodies rather than us moving into it. The panoramic framing of the painted image amplifies this with its echo of the cinema image: reality coming to us in our darkened room of comfort.

The imagery is carefully considered with the artist researching roads through repeated experiential engagement. “I’m really looking for formal qualities,” says Lloyd, “the shape of the road, the surrounding landscape, the trees, the lines, the signposts. When I find one that has interesting properties then I get to know it quite intimately.” Identifying a particular road of interest for this body of work Lloyd then spent two nights driving its 40 km length, back and forth, to the point of exhaustion. “I have a rig set up in my car with the camera as close to the driver’s point of view as possible. I can set the camera to take pictures at regular intervals, sometimes stopping the car to take shots. I also shoot HD video and paint from the still frames.”

Seeing the world through the windscreen of a car is said to have influenced the way in which we come to understand our environment. Our landscape and our relationship to it is framed by the panoramic outline of glass sheets separating us from the actual environment we hurtle through. Notions of the picturesque, where garden landscaping came to reflect ordered paintings, is intertwined in this understanding. Road planning inside national parks takes into account the best views

afforded from the windows of our vehicles rather than the complex majesty of the given ecosystems. Lloyd’s work deftly plays with these ideas, subtly infusing the otherwise banal imagery of everyday driving with conceptual depth and, importantly, painterly consideration.

For Lloyd, “being in the car is like being inside the picture. It is a fascinating experience for me, the headlights’ continuous revelation in the darkness, the rhythmic mantra of dotted lines, the hypnotic snaking of double lines, the cat’s eyes marking the edges and the blurred periphery. It stays the same but it’s always changing.” His process ensures a rich understanding of the imagery and subject he is working with. For *Slow Motion*, he says, “I do feel that there is a four-dimensional map of that road neurally imprinted in my brain.”

Let’s detour from the roads for a moment and look at the other environment represented in *Slow Motion* – mountains. Snowcapped mountains have featured in many of Lloyd’s paintings and bring with them their own meanings. They sit at counterpoint to the road paintings, anchoring the landscape and the viewer in both space and time. Where travel is measured in hours and kilometres traversed, mountain peaks evoke the long tectonic shifts of eras and ages.

Closer inspection of the two paintings ‘I Melt With You’ (2014) and ‘You’re Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go’ (2014) reveals the mountain represented in both as a warped variation, the former bending to the right in contrast to the direct verticality of the latter. It is in this variation that Lloyd inserts his sense of the uncanny, an evocation evident in much of his work. Unsettling and eerie, it lends his work a characteristically unnerving edge.

Often in landscapes bereft of obvious human intervention, Lloyd injects a touch of humanity at the periphery. Here too, in ‘You’re Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go’ (2014), a rocket rises into the sky – another pathway cut through the landscape by vehicular trajectory. The title deftly works on multiple levels, hinting at the impending absence of either the snowy mountain or the humans.

For where there are images of snowy peaks and vehicles powered by combustion engines, one cannot avoid the overlay of environmental concerns. For Lloyd, “Global warming is an ever present concern and one can’t look at ice and air travel without them coming to mind.”

The inclusion of a rocket picks up on another trope that repeats in Lloyd’s work – science fiction. “Science fiction is of interest to me when it’s a thought experiment based on science,” says Lloyd. “Here I’m more influenced by writers such as Jorge Luis Borges. Borges in *The Aleph* postulated a perspective from which multiple points in space could be seen simultaneously.” It is this way of thinking that rings true throughout much of Lloyd’s work, and especially in this body of work for *Slow Motion*. The process for creating the road paintings is itself a layering of time codes conducted from multiple spatial perspectives – from the performative nature of acquiring the images on the road to the hours of sifting through the recorded data on a screen, to the final production of the painted image itself in the studio.

Lloyd has also produced a video work for this series, adding a new perspective to his output. We are taken on a ride in the car along with the artist, winding our way through a rural landscape on a highway at night. The headlights illuminate road signs as we’re hurtled through the dark, as if guided through constellations in outer space. “The moving POV (point of view) shot is a cinematic trope, used to great effect in films like *Mad Max* and *Lost Highway*,” says Lloyd, “and driving at night can feel like a cinematic experience. But watching a film can also feel like being a passenger. They are both ways of travelling through uncertain terrains in safety.” This picks up themes evident throughout Lloyd’s work and expands on his interest in the potency of contemporary imagery. The relationship between the photograph, the moving image and the painted image is at its most interrogated in this recent body of work. “There has been a lot of cross pollination between the three mediums, and I can only see that continuing.”

Working from the moving image has elucidated a connection with painting that works perfectly for the artist’s imagery. “I paint from a screen,” Lloyd explains, “and with a photo you can zoom in and



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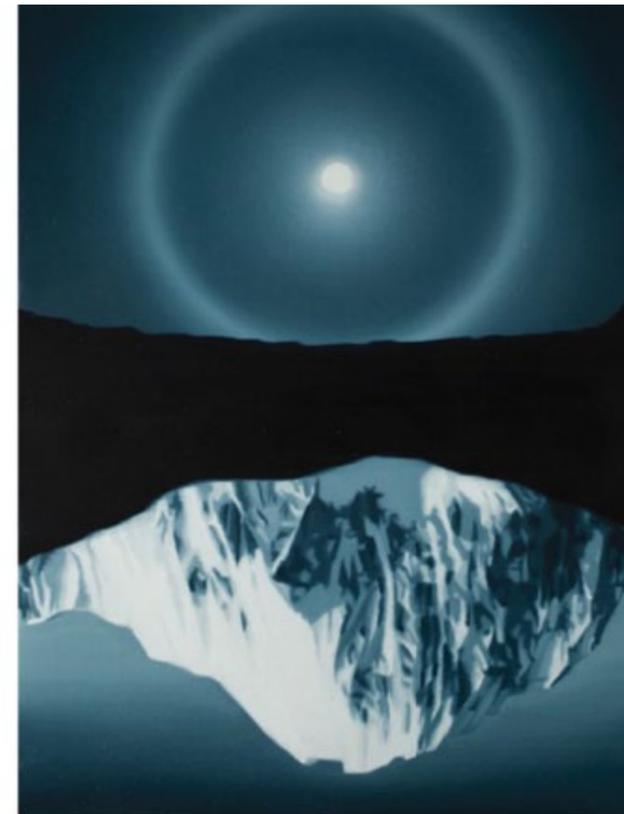


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in hours and kilometres
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see more detail because there is more recorded information. Stills from video don't have as much information, they sometimes have a painterly quality, a slight blur, a simplified palette, more contrast."

This plays out in two direct ways for the work: a formal translation of moving image to still image and an amplification of cinematic overtones in the painting. The former drives ideas about the truncation of time in a singular image and the latter imbues the painted image with qualities inherent in the act of digesting a narrative-based film.

Lloyd picks up on this idea further in his approach, revealing the extent to which cinema and painting are tied up in his thinking. "Cinema has been the dominant visual influence, Film Noir in particular. Caravaggio has been very influential as well and I see Film Noir as having a lot in common with the art of Caravaggio. The imagery is often obscured by shadow and there is a pervasive air of uncertainty. The stories told by these pictures are not satisfying ones and the viewer must complete the picture with their own imagination."

A careful consideration of the painted image and its relation to photographic means lies at the core of Lloyd's work. For painters working from photographs or film, the question about what is productively gained from that conversion is ever present. "Adding value to the photo I work from is crucial," says Lloyd. "The photo has to have the potential to make a good painting but it also has to have something missing that paint can offer it. Painting an image means gaining complete authorship over it. There are so many accidentals in a photograph, things that one doesn't realise one is photographing." Lloyd then scrutinises every aspect of the photo, deciding what to paint and working out how to paint it. "I know what I want the image to become, so painting it is about making that a reality." ■

Tony Lloyd is represented by This Is No Fantasy + Dianne Tanzer Gallery, Melbourne, Hill Smith Gallery, Adelaide, and Gallery 9, Sydney

EXHIBITION
Slow Motion
Gallery 9, Sydney
12–29 November, 2014

www.diannetanzergallery.net.au
www.hillsmithgallery.com.au
www.gallery9.com.au
www.tonylloyd.info

- 01 Departure, 2014, oil on linen, 61 x 122cm
- 02 Parallel lines, 2014 oil on linen 61 x 122cm
- 03 I melt with you, 2014, oil on linen, 61 x 122cm
- 04 Chain Reaction, 2013, oil on linen, 4 panel polyptych, each 61 x 46cm
- 05 Rainy Monday, 2014, oil on linen, 45 x 100cm

Courtesy of the artist and Gallery 9.