

A PLACE TO REST

Thornton Walker's masterful landscapes hover between the real and the imagined, offering a meditative refuge in uncertain times.

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"My interest is much more in eliciting a feeling, a fantastical, dream-like world... the paintings and watercolours might start off describing a hill in Tasmania or a recollected landscape in New Zealand, but during the painting process these specific references become more unclear."

Thornton Walker's masterful *modus operandi*—tormenting the strictures of figuration with the atmospheric unknowns of abstraction, gleaned from decades of pushing paint around—has earned the Melbourne-based, New Zealand-born artist a significant place in Australia's art history. His work is represented in important collections including the British Museum, London; the Aichi Museum of Art, Nagoya; and closer to home, the National Gallery of Australia and the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

A meditative place to rest, in a world finely balancing humanity, the natural world and a charged artificial world, is the calming salve that awaits the viewer. The nuances of such tensions are layered in Walker's picture plane, searching out a new way to speak—one flat space that shifts to another flat space, purposely looking like a stage set, stylised. Understandably, artists such as **Hiroshige**, **Félix Valléon**, **Susan Jane Walp** and **Aubrey Levinthal**, with their flattened picture planes, have been quiet companions on Walker's journey.







LEFT: Thornton Walker, *Allegory, the scent of plum*, 2025. Oil on canvas, 190 x 150cm.

OPPOSITE: Thornton Walker, *Rakaunui*, 2025. Oil on canvas, 130 x 100cm.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND AUSTRALIAN GALLERIES, NARRM/MELBOURNE.

"The landscape surface still interests me while composition, space, abstract concerns infiltrate my work, which is why they can be quite fanciful, even surreal. They're as much about the composition and the quality of the paint surface as they are about the landscape."

That landscape can be imagined or observed from his Richmond studio, the stockroom of the former Christine Abrahams Gallery, or his Falmouth studio in remote Tasmanian terrain. However, as the painting process evolves, the memory slips away and the specific references to place become more amorphous, such as in *Allegory, the scent of plum* (2025) and *Evening, bent pine*, (2024).

Walker's forthcoming exhibition with Australian Galleries will reveal the hallmarks of a practitioner who has made a profound

contribution to the language of art—one who knows how to look and look again, then fuse imagery and associations to a complex depth, pulling the viewer into a world somewhere else.

Stuart Purves, who has been representing artists for decades, says (in a voice not to be argued with): "Thornton can paint! He is cultured, intelligent, an astute observer who can bring something entirely honest and alive to something quite commonplace. His eyes and intelligence filter what is in front and enable him to make what we know alive, and that is what is occurring in *Landscapes for uncertain times*."

In gifting a language through which we can come to understand the world, Walker's painting reminds us that seeking out beauty, and holding on to it, is a critical part of a cultured life.

"...as the painting process evolves, the memory slips away and the specific references to place become more amorphous..."

~ Thornton Walker

Thornton Walker, *Landscapes for uncertain times* is showing from 1 – 19 July at Australian Galleries, Narrm/Melbourne.



STUART PURVES

Director, Australian Galleries

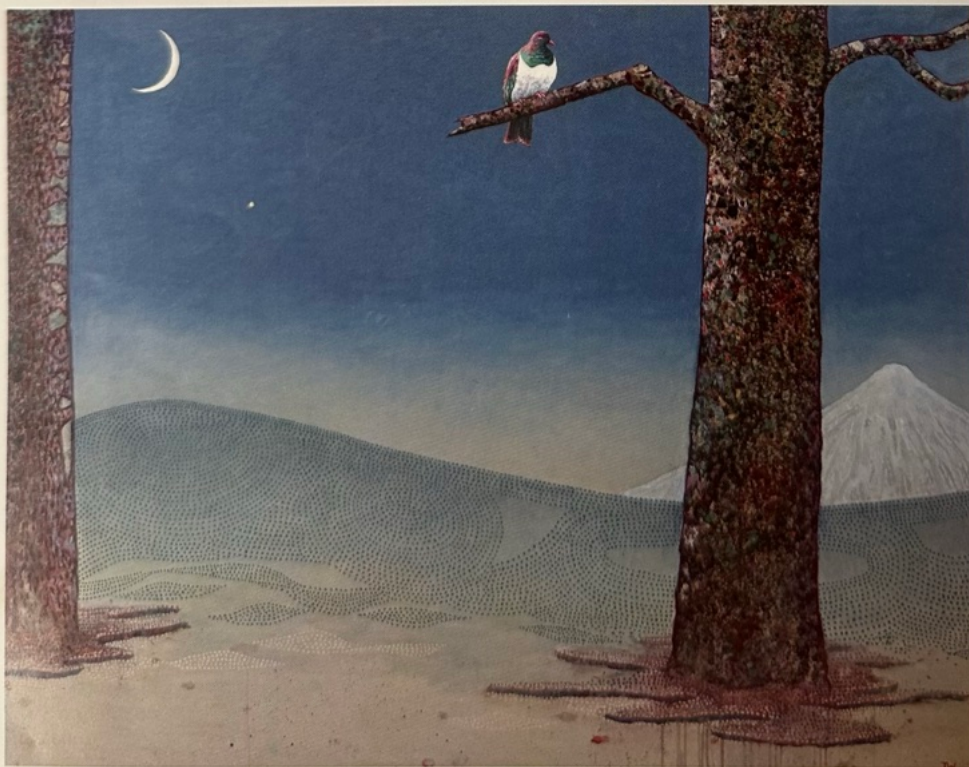
Thornton is cultured, intelligent and can really paint! An astute observer who can bring something most exciting to a subject that captures his attention. His eyes and sharpness extract qualities of the chosen subject in front of him. For instance, he can make a laid out still life, be very much alive, along with revealing the tension of the outside world. All these abilities are clear in his exhibition, *Landscapes for uncertain times*. Thornton's work is compelling; they immediately draw us in by their beauty and uncertain mystery. He sets us the challenge to find ourselves through his version of both history and our increasing chaotic world. You do not take for granted the painting of his that you walk past every day at home. Such works continue to reach out to you, even after years. The work by Thornton and all good artists, demands a continuous exchange.

SASHA GRISHIN AM, FAHA

Emeritus Professor at the Australian
National University, Ngambri/ Canberra

"Thornton Walker is an artist who is a teller of stories without a narrative. He is a staunchly figurative artist, but one who paints highly abstracted images. He is also a philosopher who meditates on the nature of the whole world, but does this by examining in exceptional detail a small fragment in a painting, contemplating a haiku or rediscovering part of an old photograph which has been stripped of its original context ... The best paintings by Thornton Walker are very much about "the spiritual rhythm ... which pervades heaven and earth"

— From the essay by Professor Sasha Grishin AM, FAHA included in the monograph *Thornton Walker* (2015) published by Melbourne Books.



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~ Stuart Purves

OPPOSITE: Thornton Walker, *Orchard with ladder*, 2024. Watercolour and ink, paper 46.5 x 42cm.

LEFT: Thornton Walker, *The night watch, Kereru*, 2025. Oil on canvas, 140 x 180cm.
COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND AUSTRALIAN GALLERIES, NARRM/MELBOURNE



Salmouth + Kieran Dahan

TK July '24