

EXHIBITIONS Gina Kalabishis *Heartland* 14th April 2015 - 2nd May 2015

Rick Amor Drawing Prize winner Gina Kalabishis explores the feeling of love in all its permutations in her latest body of beautifully painted works. Embedded in to a mythological heartland of Australian flora and composed as sensual ikebana arrangements, she constructs narratives based around imagined past and future landscapes.



HEARTLAND

'Gloomy and indigestibly stodgy' is how art critic Robert Hughes famously described the paintings of Eugene von Guérard in his 1966 book *The Art of Australia*. Since then the nineteenth century émigré artist from Austria has been restored to the pantheon of artistic greats and Hughes himself has expired, and yet something of that 'gloom' remains imprinted on von Guérard and his contemporaries.



In the paintings of Gina Kalabishis, which freely pay homage to the early colonial art of Australia, that so-called 'gloom' has been not so much intensified but redefined, into a celebratory reclamation of this heritage. Peering through the veil of shadows we discover moving epitaphs to love, friendship and community. As a kind of romantic social-humanist Kalabishis draws together various fields of art making into poignant and powerfully cohesive images. Combining von Guérard and Ikebana shouldn't work but here it does—though neither are entirely orthodox in their depiction. Where once her lush botanic specimens occupied a shallow space of pure colour, Kalabishis has introduced details from iconic paintings by the heroes of Australian art—von Guérard, Streeton, Condor and McCubbin—to provide a background. Their icon status, however, has been dampened through a process of blurring and inversion, of both the original picture's orientation and tone. The results are both disorienting and dreamlike—Kalabishis presents us with



Gina Kalabishis
Heartland131061 2015
oil on linen
152cm x 121cm



Gina Kalabishis
Heartland 181029 2015
oil on linen
152cm x 87cm

a curious hybrid of the visible and the invisible, as if our heroes have travelled through a glass darkly. The genres, also, are muddled, to effectively level the playing field against a spectral light that has no precedent in art.

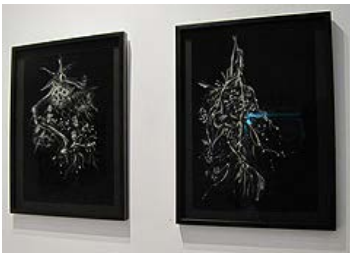


Gina Kalabishis
Strath Creek Merri Creek (after von Guerard) 2015
 oil on linen
 122cm x 91cm

For Kalabishis—an Australian with Greek heritage living in Melbourne, with friends and family scattered near and far—'Heartland' is a place where all loved ones can gather. They unite just as the artist has united the fronds of her native plants, brought together against the odds in a common place. Kalabishis' plants are mostly Australian native—hardy, tolerant and adaptable (just like Australians, she says)—but are shown in monochrome, where the darker tones might symbolise Aboriginal Australians, and the lighter tones the fair-skinned arrivals from recent centuries. The mid-tones are the 'in-betweens', where the two have merged. Their compositions are not formal, but recall instead the jumble of seaweed.



Gina Kalabishis
True Blue 1 2015
 oil on linen
 152cm x 87cm



The crisp, sharp detail of the botanical specimens contrasts with the out of focus landscapes behind. Both are subjects we commonly associate with sunlight—certainly within the Australian artistic tradition (think only of Streeton's 'Golden Summers')—but here become otherworldly and ethereal. These are potent hearths for the imagination to flare; they double as memento mori for the natural environment, under threat from the agencies of man, and serve as a warning of what we stand to lose. Kalabishis is at once the funnel for the past traditions of art to coalesce, and a prophet of its demise. The inverted landscapes and suspended plants give rise to a sensation of imminent collapse.



Gina Kalabishis
True Blue 2 2015
 oil on linen
 122cm x 91cm



While not at the forefront of the artist's intentions, there is an indelible sexual energy about these pictures. From the languid, curling leaves to the inviting openings and apertures to the velvety dark tones, we sense the proximity of heady primal urges. As images of sex and love, community and togetherness, and environmental catastrophe, there is much to discover (and continually

rediscover) within these haunting and very beautiful paintings. Kalabishis presents the vision through the doorway; we have only to draw breath, step through and enter.

Essay by Simon Gregg,
Curator Gippsland Art Gallery



Gina Kalabishis lives and works in Melbourne, she holds a Post Graduate Diploma of Visual Arts, Bachelor of Fine Art (Painting) from the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne University and a Advanced Diploma of Arts (Electronic Design and Interactive Multimedia) from Victoria University in 2003.

She has featured in solo and group exhibitions in Australia, Spain and America and has been selected for number of significant national art prizes. In 2014 Kalabishis was awarded the prestigious **Rick Amor Drawing Prize** from a field of over 450 submissions, as well as being announced a finalist in the Eutick Still Life Award, and the Adelaide Perry Prize for Drawing. Kalabishis is represented in major collections including the **National Gallery of Australia**.

[GINA KALABISHIS PROFILE](#)
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Gina Kalabishis
Saplings Rejoice (after Tom Roberts) study 2015
oil on linen
50cm x 35cm



Gina Kalabishis
Embrace (After Streeton) study 2015
oil on linen
50cm x 35cm



Gina Kalabishis
Heartland 117119 2015
pastel on velour paper (framed)
50cm x 35cm



Gina Kalabishis
Separation Branch 2015

pastel on velour paper (framed)
50cm x 35cm



Gina Kalabishis
Lost Found (After McCubbin) 2015
pastel on velour paper (framed)
50cm x 35cm



Gina Kalabishis
Ricketts Point Honeysuckle (after Conder) 2015
pastel on velour paper (framed)
50cm x 35cm