

# BORROWED SPACE



LEFT: Joel Arthur,  
*Borrowed Space*, 2023.  
Oil on linen, 61 x 76cm.

OPPOSITE: Joel Arthur,  
*New Apartments*, 2024.  
Oil on linen, 152 x 122cm.

PHOTOS: BRENTON  
MCGEACHIE. COURTESY:  
THE ARTIST AND THIS IS  
NO FANTASY, MELBOURNE.

**Joel Arthur** draws our attention to parks and public spaces, using historical landscape painting tropes to foreground the contemporary settler colonial context in which they sit.

WORDS | TESS MAUNDER

Raised in Canberra on Ngambri and Ngunnawal Country in the 90s, **Joel Arthur**, like his millennial peers, was born into a time of rapid global accelerationism in the form

of globalisation, neoliberalism and the emergence of the internet.

Naturally, these shifts had a huge impact on the art world from the 1990s onwards, with

the rise of biennale-culture, the emergence of defining the contemporary and relational aesthetics all gaining traction in the 1990s and 2000s.



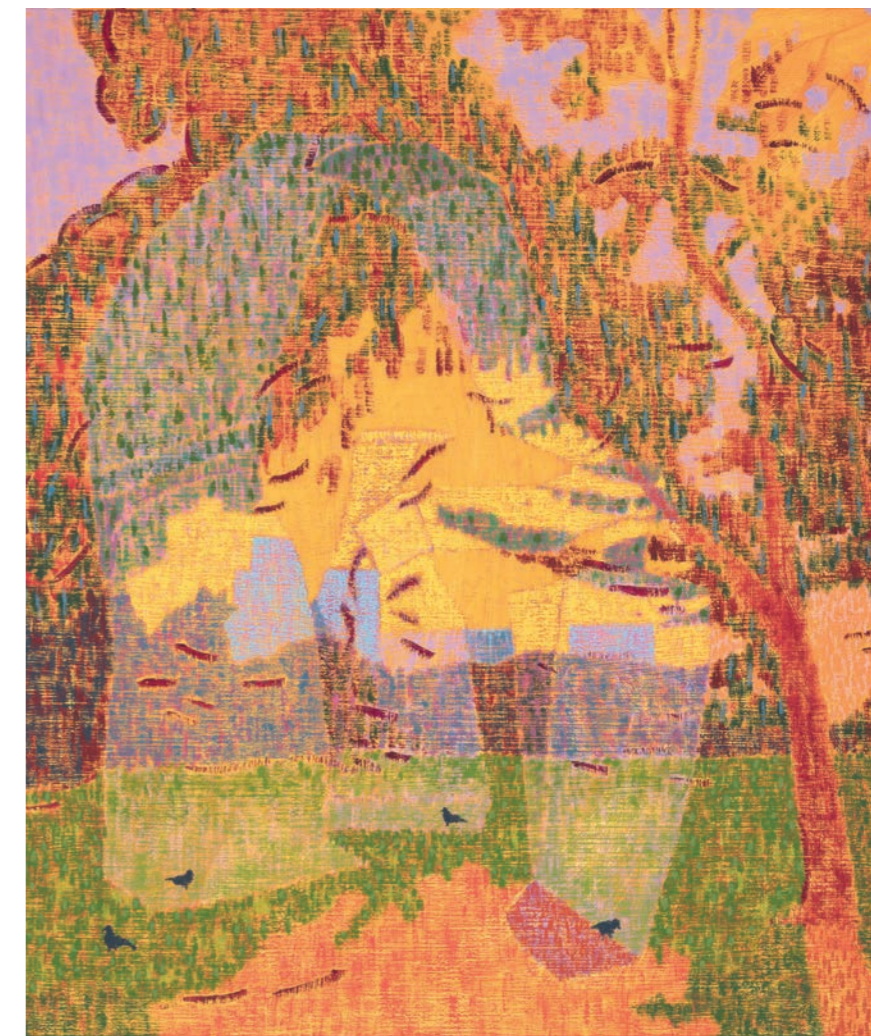


Fast forward to 2010 where art audiences witnessed an interesting revival of what we might regard as more traditional mediums such as ceramics, textiles and modernist approaches to painting. This phenomenon is what art critic **Hal Foster** coined the Return of the Real, which is when an artwork is informed by an awareness of the key events in the turn of the 20th century and yet utilises pre-war art traditions to explore contemporary concerns.

Stylistically a cross between **Michael Armitage**, **Peter Doig** and **Jem Peruchini**, Arthur presents a sort of glitchy landscape in a liminal space not exactly rooted in reality or a specific time and place, and yet also presenting enough familiarity that we might be able to place certain references in his work. So then when we look at his work, we need to understand that his practice isn't as simple as the artist having a fetish for painting and a Modernist revival. No, it seems that Arthur wishes to actually use historical painting tropes to subvert and problematise the relationship between pre-war art practices, and the social and political history of landscape painting and to question how we might reconcile with the fall out of this context from within a contemporary settler colonial context.

Arthur makes this possible through drawing our attention to the role of parks and public space, where he presents a sort of glitched up version of reality. Here, perhaps questioning the fact that the design of these spaces that we widely consider sites of recreation, rest and community, have in fact often been informed by colonial histories of occupation, erasure and indeed, violence. On this Arthur says: "I see the urban park a false stand in for nature, which acts as a signifier for environmental issues or a stage that questions social concerns." In his works, Arthur questions binaries such as private versus public, real versus the artifice and natural versus human-made.

*Plots and Grounds* is Arthur's first solo exhibition with Melbourne gallery THIS



IS NO FANTASY and will showcase a new suite of paintings exploring public spaces. Co-directors **Nicola Stein** and **Dianne Tanzer** comment: "we were drawn to the merging of representation and abstraction in Joel's practice. The boundaries between nature, constructed forms and everyday subjects blur in his works, making them feel at once familiar and foreign." Indeed having been a finalist in the 2023 Arthur Guy Memorial Prize, Waverley Art Prize, Muswellbrook Art Prize and Bayside Acquisitive Art Prize, stylistically, conceptually and contextually Arthur is one to watch.

OPPOSITE: Joel Arthur, *Dwelling*, 2023. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 152 x 183cm.

ABOVE: Joel Arthur, *Social Structure*, 2023. Oil on linen, 81 x 71cm.

PHOTOS: BRENTON MCGEACHIE, COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND THIS IS NO FANTASY, MELBOURNE.

Joel Arthur's solo exhibition *Plots and Grounds* shows at THIS IS NO FANTASY, Melbourne from 16 April to 11 May 2024.