



Steve Lopes



Steve Lopes is a figurative painter who uses the landscape as a vehicle to investigate human existence. He often works *en plein air*, painting vignettes of a place which are used as references for large-scale studio works. While his landscapes are often a representation of what he saw, the figures are often imagined personalities, or placed into the composition after the fact. He often depicts isolated figures to emphasise the displacement of the human figure within the world. On the tour, Lopes looked closely at the paintings of miner, Sam Byrne, whose character began to enter the compositions.

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As a figurative painter, how important is the landscape to your work? It's very important as it sets the tone and atmosphere of a work. It can make or break a painting and depending on what you're trying to achieve it can set up the psychological setting for an image. Sometimes what you respond to will create a work you didn't expect and one has to respond to the location in an 'improvisatory' way which allows for interesting and surprising results. I have no preconceived notions – often I will place a figure in afterwards or as I'm working in reaction to the landscape or what is developing.

What is it about the landscape of Fowlers Gap you've investigated that continues to influence your work?

The dry, low-tone colour of the area allows for an openness of the picture plane. It's not so much about what you're trying to capture in a way, but more about the feel of the flat spindly desert. Horizontals predominate and then little hilly bumps pockmark the horizon with scrubby trees and silvery greys, which work well with figures and objects that I place in the picture plane.

What role does the figure play in your work? How are you resolving this in the suite of paintings from this trip?

I've been influenced by the historical aspect of the area more than I thought I would be. Stories of the early miners and the locals as the area flourished and developed have filtered in. The paintings of Sam Byrne, an old Broken Hill miner, have influenced what I'm doing with the figure – making them awkward and clunky. I've attempted a series of works that have been directly influenced by the Cornish Miners who were sent out to remote parts of the Barrier Ranges like Euriovie. Their stories of hardship and application have wound their way into my imagery.

Do you enjoy painting *en plein air*? Is this a regular part of your painting process?

Yep, I love it! Being based in the city, I make a real effort to go on a



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number of camping trips throughout the year in different locations around the country. I like to come away with a swag of studies that feed back into my studio work.

I have just returned from a productive trip to Beijing, working outdoors in the villages. I also recently painted out at Alice Springs and along the Larapinta Trail and regularly go to a number of locations in Orange and the Central West.

The life of an artist is often one of solitude. How did you find the experience of working amongst a group of artists?

It's inspiring and I get on well enough with all the other artists. It's actually quite liberating and relaxing for me to have a joke with like-minded artists and paint together, catching up on all the gossip, painting methods and what everyone else is into or finding of value. There are times when you want to be left alone and just walk off into the scrub or a creek bed to quietly get on with your work, but if you are open and prepared to engage with other artists, it can be very rewarding.

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Often I will place a figure in afterwards or as I'm working in reaction to the landscape.

What challenges did this trip throw at you and your painting?

Probably finding the right focal points in the landscape to attach myself onto. It's fine to sit down and capture what's in front of you but to make something that has interest or is insightful is always difficult. This particular area doesn't reveal itself immediately at all because of its flat and nondescript nature. I think everyone thought long and hard about it and came away challenged.

What was the most enjoyable part of the tour?

For me the cooking and entertaining. I enjoyed preparing a number of the meals and the atmosphere and camaraderie were priceless. The fact I didn't poison anyone was a bonus! ■

Steve Lopes is represented by Stella Downer Fine Art, Sydney, Colville Gallery, Hobart, and Buratti Fine Art, Perth.

www.stelladownerfineart.com.au
www.colvillestreetartgallery.com.au
www.buratti.com.au
www.stevelopes.com.au

EXHIBITION

Junk
 Stella Downer Fine Art, Sydney
 17 Jul to 18 Aug, 2012

Steve Lopes and Euan Macleod
 Fiumano Fine Art, London UK
 3 to 24 Oct, 2012

01 Barkindji Elder, Euriovie, 2011, oil on board, 40 x 50cm
 02 Painting Elisabeth, 2011, oil on board, 40 x 50cm
 03 Solarch Figure, 2011, oil on canvas, 80 x 140cm
 04 Twin Tanks, diptych, 2011, oil on board, 55 x 120cm
 05 Solarch Figure, triptych, 2011, oil on board, 40 x 90cm
 Images courtesy the artist and Stella Downer Fine Art, Sydney

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