



# Resistance!

Paintings as Provisional Realities

Ruth Waller, Derek O'Connor,  
Stephen Pleban + Paul Uhlmann

June 16-July 3, 2022



**M-16 ARTSPACE**

Wednesday-Sunday, 12-5pm  
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# painting: on the nature of the emerging and vanishing image

Paul Uhlmann

**IT IS OLD:** Painting is an unusual theatre of action, spanning tens of thousands of years, which has the unique distinction of representing an unbroken link with our ancestors across cultures and millennia. Painting has grown with us as we have endured ice ages, observed creatures come and go, lands transformed by tundra and great oceans freeze over. In response to the ice, we created consciousness in partnership with painting, descending into nether worlds of absolute darkness to project images using faltering torch light within underground caverns, using our mouths to spit pigment, engrave surfaces and apply charcoal. Painting has created images as we have roamed the planet by foot or raft. It has enabled wordless communication across cultures. It has claimed a kind of unity in times of absolute division and disruption. It has illuminated heaven and hell. It is by nature full of paradox; it defies classification and yet seeks to communicate; it clarifies objects of the real world as well as the realm of the senses, the arena that cannot be seen, but only felt.

**DEATH:** Painting has endured change and with every announcement of its death, rises again. The events that apparently cause it to pass are merely absorbed into the fabric of its production; photography was to see off its use, but was repurposed into the matrix and, as the digital world too seeks to make humanity into machines, it becomes another way of organising a hybrid approach through creating.

**RESISTANCE:** This exhibition provides a forum for embodied engagement with the materiality of painting. Painting seeks to reveal provisional images of everyday reality where memory, experience and history collide. Whilst we see Contemporary Painting as incorporating

the digital realm, we lever opposition to the daily avalanche of algorithms and pixels which increasingly dominate contemporary lives, threaten digital addiction, and reduce complex issues to silo, polar positions. The artists present painting as a philosophical process to ask open questions through meditative engagement.

**ARTISTS:** The paintings of Ruth Waller reflect a deep material engagement with the natural world - the botanical fuses with the geological, and the organic with and the geometric, shifting between surface, substance, and space. Stephen Pleban, through wit, toxic colours and storytelling, seeks to understand the conflict between humanity and our environment. A sense of rupture within history is present within the erasure paintings of Derek O'Connor; painting becomes a kind of archaeology imprinted onto consciousness; stains of the past continuously re-emerge. Paul Uhlmann sees painting as a form of philosophy which reveals images through process to consider impermanence and interconnectedness - everything is connected to everything else - what we do to the environment we do to ourselves.

For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives  
In the valley of its making where executives  
Would never want to tamper, flows on south  
From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,  
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,  
A way of happening, a mouth.

Fragment excerpt from *In Memory of W. B. Yeats*  
W.H. Auden (1907-1973)



**Ruth Waller**

*Pink creeper and bright rocks, 2021*

Acrylic on board and balsa

40.5 × 30.5cm



**Ruth Waller**  
*Sombre Flora*, 2022  
Acrylic on board and balsa  
46 × 61cm



**Derek O'Connor**  
*Strike Zone*, 2022  
Oil on canvas  
41 × 31cm



**Derek O'Connor**  
*Odesa, 2022*  
Oil on canvas  
51 × 41cm



**Stephen Pleban**  
*Soundscape Ecology I*, 2022  
Oil and wax on linen  
92 x 102 cm





**Stephen Pleban**  
*Soundscape, Ecology II, 2022*  
Oil and wax on linen  
92 × 102 cm



**Paul Uhlmann**  
*Ladder (smoke)*, 2022  
Oil on canvas  
91 × 61cm



**Paul Uhlmann**  
*bird (smoke)*, 2022  
Oil on canvas  
41 × 36cm

**Ruth Waller** taught Painting at ANU School of Art for twenty-eight years and now works full-time in her Canberra studio. Recently her work has drawn on the pleasure she takes in the local bushland, her garden, the nearby National Botanic Gardens and time spent in a family cottage in the Blue Mountains. Her focus on botanical themes was also stimulated by an Australia Council residency on the island of Suomenlinna, Finland in 2015. Her work is held in many local and state collections and the National Gallery of Australia.

**Represented:** Nancy Sever Gallery  
+ Rogue Gallery, Sydney.

**Derek O'Connor** was born in England and moved to Australia in 1969. He holds a BA from the Canberra School of Art, ANU, and a Graduate Diploma from the University of Tasmania School of Art. Since 1992 he has held 28 solo exhibitions, including the highly esteemed Watters Gallery, Legge Gallery Sydney, Karen Woodbury Gallery, Melbourne, and Helen Maxwell Gallery in Canberra. In 2007 a ten year survey of his work was held at Canberra Museum and Gallery and in 2017 his exhibition *At home he is a tourist* was shown at the Canberra Contemporary Art Space.

**Represented:** Nancy Sever Gallery.

**Stephen Pleban** completed a Bachelor of Fine Art at the Victorian College of the Arts (1983-86) in Australia, and later completed postgraduate studies at the Academie Van Beeldende in Rotterdam, the Netherlands (1995-96). Stephen's artwork has been exhibited in solo and group shows in Australia and overseas. His work has been selected and exhibited in a number of well-respected Australian art prizes including the Len Fox Art Award, Castlemaine Art Gallery (2019); the Kilgour Art Prize, Newcastle Art Gallery (2019); and the Glover Art Prize, Tasmania (2020). In 2021 he exhibited at Martin Browne Contemporary (Sydney) Summer Group Show.

**Paul Uhlmann** is a practicing artist who works in painting, printmaking and artists' books and is coordinator of Visual Arts in the School of Arts and Humanities, Edith Cowan University in Perth. He is interested in philosophies of process and impermanence. He studied art in Australia and Europe [Germany, DAAD scholarship (1986-87) and Anne and Gordon International Samstag Visual Arts Scholarship Netherlands (1994-95)]. He has exhibited nationally and internationally since 1983. His work is held in many collections including; National Gallery of Australia, Art Gallery of NSW, Art Gallery of WA and National Gallery of Victoria.

**Represented:** Art Collective WA.

Exhibition curated by Paul Uhlmann.