

PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release
16 April 2024

Amanda Johnson
Stranglehold: Colonial Heat
Exhibition runs 7 May – 1 June 2024



Melbourne's fortyfivedownstairs presents *Stranglehold: Colonial Heat*, a new exhibition by **Amanda Johnson** opening on 7 May 2024.

Stranglehold: Colonial Heat presents striking, uncanny landscapes by Glover Prize and Hadley Prize shortlistee Amanda Johnson.

The exhibition continues the artist's long-term exploration of Australian landscape history in response to the troubled ecological present. Johnson documents sites where optimistic depictions of early colonial landscape were created, places often adjacent to logging and water mining sites that had been deftly kept out of frame. Such 'shadow places', in philosopher Val Plumwood's words ('Shadow places and the politics of dwelling', *Australian Humanities Review*, 44: 139–150, 2008), were seldom taken up as colonial painting subjects and, within Australian visual culture still, idealised landscape tropes and pictorial illusions of terra nullius retain a vice-like grip.

Today, in Victorian Mountain Ash forests, evidence reveals that half the logging coupes have not been re-seeded and/or are failing to regenerate within three years – contrary to claims made by outgoing government agency VicForests. Surveys show 'some logged areas have been turned into weed-infested blackberry patches' (After the Logging: Failure to regrow Victoria's Native Forests, Margaret Blakers, report produced in conjunction with 19 Victorian Environmental groups, Canberra, 2021, p. 8, <https://vnpa.org.au/publications/after-the-logging>).

In *Stranglehold: Colonial Heat*, Amanda Johnson creates elegiac, but devastating, portraits of logging aftermath. Shadow in all its ruinous glory is returned to the landscaped frame.

Many paintings in this exhibition were completed on the artist's Landcare home on Gadabanud country at Cape Otway, while fieldtrips were undertaken to the Tasmanian South Cape, Tarkine and Florentine valleys. In the studio, the artist builds bush silhouettes that reference Eugene Von Guerard, Arthur Streeton and Tom Roberts, among others. But these sources recede as the artist maps changes to vegetation profiles and species diversity – the invasion of blackberry and sweet pittosporum in the Otway State Forest, and strangling infestations in selected Tasmanian locations. Elsewhere, gorse-filled vistas allude to sentimental Streetonesque farm subjects, while painted weather above the hedgerows essays ecological collapse.

In these exhilarating temporal mashups of colonial imagery and site-specific observation, vibrant, often toxic colour manipulates generic scenes. And while 'sunset views' traditionally suggest the passing of time, inducing the lyrical and a sense of escape, twilight here is suffused with a feverish DayGlo uncertainty.

This exhibition, full of wild colour and disquieting beauty, is an elicitation of mourning. Many paintings bear witness to clearfelling, while others evoke loss by stepping back in time to the moment before decisions to log were made. Each remaining great tree depicted, though now mere pictorial memory, invites viewers to also step back in time, to mourn, and to act.

Amanda Johnson will be in conversation with art historian Associate Professor Alison Inglis at fortyfivedownstairs on Saturday 18 May, 2.30–3.30pm.

The artist: Amanda Johnson

Amanda Johnson is a painter and writer living and working on Gadabanud country in Cape Otway, Victoria. Her work has been shortlisted in the Glover Prize (2022), Hadley's Art Prize (2022, 2021 and 2019) and Bruny Prize (2018 and 2016). Her most recent solo exhibitions *Sunset Clause* and *Colonial Heat* were held at In the Skies Gallery in Lorne, Victoria in 2021 and 2022, and at fortyfivedownstairs in 2018. Since graduating from a Masters in painting at Victorian College of the Arts in 1995, Amanda has been the recipient of Asialink and Arthur Boyd Bundanon residencies for painting. Her exhibition *Friable: The Lost Garden* was held at Geelong Gallery in 2015 as part of the gallery's regional artists program.



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Opening night:
7 May 2024: 5:00pm –7:00pm
Exhibition runs:
7 May – 1 June 2024
Tuesday – Friday: 12.00pm – 7.00pm
Saturday: 12.00pm – 4.00pm

About fortyfivedownstairs

A unique multi-arts venue and cultural incubator, fortyfivedownstairs has a twenty-year history of supporting the development of independent artists across the visual and performing arts.

Located in Melbourne's CBD, fortyfivedownstairs has two exhibition spaces, and a flexible theatre and event venue, which operate all year round. Venturing one floor below street level, the gallery exhibits a diverse range of art forms, from photography, to drawing, to sound art, and more.

One floor further still, down into the building's basement, the warehouse-style theatre space provides a home for an extraordinary array of ground-breaking works in theatre, cabaret, music, opera and dance. One week you could be attending a classical music recital, the next, the world premiere of a new Australian play featuring award-winning actors.

CONTACT

More information

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[Images and captions here](#)

*Since 2002 **fortyfivedownstairs**, a not-for-profit organisation, has offered an evocative urban space and a personalised service to an eclectic mix of artists for theatre, visual arts, forum, music and dance.*

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Image credits

Amanda Johnson

Stranglehold: Colonial Heat, Cape Otway, 2023, oil and acrylic polymer on canvas, 122 x 155cm

New Gloveresque: Tailings Lake, Tarkayna, 2023, oil and acrylic polymer on canvas, 122 x 122cm