

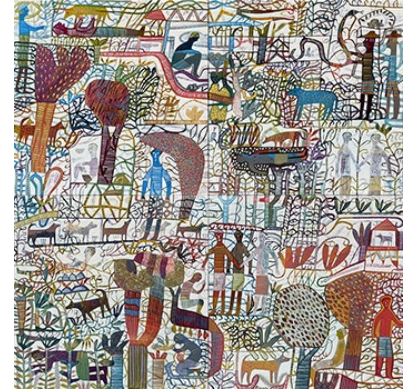
# robert ryan

## 52 Weeks

December 24 2022 – January 14 2023

The underlying theme in Robert Ryan's paintings has essentially always been about a relationship to one's surroundings and situation. In mid 2018, he made the decision to leave the now ever bustling, upmarket Byron environ and relocate to Tasmania's relatively isolated northeast coast. Its remoteness subsequently proved a boon when pandemic circumstances mandated isolation Australia wide.

Explaining the title for his new body of work Ryan informs, "As 2021 drew to a close I was wondering what the coming year might bring. Like everyone else, I'd been cooped up for a couple of years, albeit to an artist who had produced two exhibitions during the interim, that wasn't unusual. I had the desire to travel somewhere again but at the same time, leaving my safe little haven was a bit daunting. Offer of another show resolved the conundrum."



The exhibition's title, *52 Weeks*, relates to Ryan's commitment to now produce paintings for yet another year. The ensuing works once more encapsulate his wayfaring through landscapes of place, time and consciousness. Increasingly however, there is a sense of total immersion in the melding of inner and outer worlds. Understanding that the natural realm is fundamentally made up of vibratory connective energy, he has released his imagery from traditional perspectives. The paintings induce the kind of reverie that one might experience when wholly encompassed by nature.

Exemplifying this is the *Estuary* work where a figure lies recumbent absorbing the bounty. "*Estuary* is a literal reference to the Scamander river mouth below my house," Ryan tells. "It's claimed that some of the cleanest water in the world is in this region and at high tide on a nice day it's stunning, so this painting is a little salute." The title, *Secret Garden*, is indeed apt for this particular work. Infinitely complex linear activity enmeshes the entire surface, so much so it is difficult to discern what exists within the foliage. Ryan explains, "It was inspired by the small canopies one finds on some beaches. Hidden places, their shaded, dappled light offers private sanctuary. There are a few spots like this in the beautiful Bay of Fires area just north of where I live."

*Young Man With Dog* is another painting covered in a myriad of arabesque markings. The figure would be obscured but for its central position and lack of colour. Ryan imparts that the idea was to evince the multifarious thoughts and uncertainties that can assail a teenage boy. His dog however, seems eager to get on with exploring what's happening out there in the surrounding environment.

The warm-hued colours of the *Pick of the Litter* painting celebrate the arrival of a dear friend and her dog to Tasmania. Ryan's dog Kandi, who until now was his sole companion, had become somewhat querulous. In this work a seated man awaits approaching figures, the woman in front extends arms bearing a small pooch. The tail positions of the watching canines at top and base of the painting subtly reference Kandi's reservation towards the newcomers' cordial welcome.

Comprised of four separately painted boards, the *Everyman* painting "references the multiple ideological positions a man can occupy." While the rudimentary figures have personal connotations, they are intended to have universal implication. The features of the men are thus deliberately nondescript. Amidst a cornucopia of fantastical trees and plant forms, individuals are ensconced in meditation, tend gardens, join hands in unity and mutual support or lie outstretched. Others appear to stand vacantly facing the viewer or perhaps infinity? 'Man's best friend' is ever present.

In describing the *For Life* imagery Ryan discloses, "It's about those rare birds that mate for life, in this case the albatross... or those rarer birds – people who have remained partners from youth." Within a complex web of visual and symbolic correlations the focus is directed to the central positioning of three figures, their arms raised in salutation to a pair of albatross flying aloft. Close by a man and woman hold hands. The lone individuals populating the background bear testimony to the contrary outcome of relationship breakdowns. The mood is one of acceptance but the painting also celebrates those fortunately bound in unity for life.

Representing a large slice of Ryan's 52 weeks' hiatus, the extraordinary vignettes manifest in minutiae Ryan's observations, memories and thoughts, both pensive and buoyant.

JACQUELINE HOUGHTON

29 Tedder Avenue, Main Beach, QLD 4217 **Postal Address:** PO Box 985, Main Beach, QLD 4217

**Phone:** 07 5561 1166 **Email:** info@antheapolsonart.com.au **Web:** www.antheapolsonart.com.au