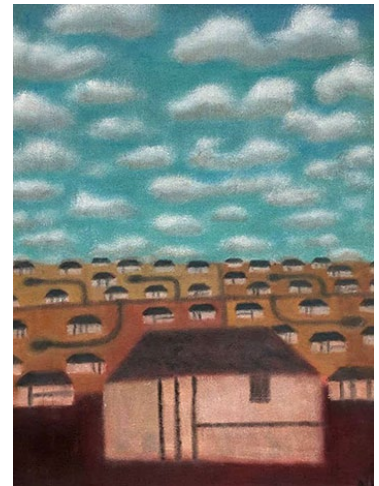


# nick howson

## *From The Bush To The Sea*

October 26 to November 14, 2024

Melbourne-based Nick Howson's latest body of work depicts his immersive experience of landscape during long distance car journeys to Sydney and the Blue Mountains last year. Eschewing expressways, the route traversed forests, rural vistas and coastal areas where he often stayed for days at a time to explore and sketch his observations for future paintings. Howson had crafted wooden 'cigar box lids' to also depict first-hand encounters during the trip, their small size expedient for storage whilst driving. These were painted on site, albeit not entirely *en plein air* due to the oil medium.



Perhaps registering a farewell to mankind's overtly utilitarian habitation is the *Housing Estate* painting. The dominant foreground house rises from a symbolically dark band deprived of any vegetation. Behind it rows of virtually identical abodes extend to the horizon, their hard-edged geometric renditions accentuating the absence of the natural world's cadence, present only in the puffy cloud filled sky above.

Howson relays that the title of the exhibition derived from having travelled through National Parks approaching the Victorian and NSW border and arriving at a bay near Eden. He informs that after such a mammoth drive from inner city Richmond it was a wonderful relief, "I remember walking exhausted into the crystal clear sea."

The tree trunks rising from the base of several paintings and their relatively tiny round tops evoke the perspective as seen from a car window. Howson tells, "They are not botanically correct, it's more about expressing a feeling of their majestic size." His paintings have never been literal representations. Narrative is not the primary focus. Howson's art communicates a visual experience beyond the strictures of traditional landscape painting.

An example of Howson's search for harmony in a sensory orchestration of colour and shape is the *Ocean Racing* painting. It is an abstracted visage of humankind's determination amidst nature's stormy, turbulent elements. Two yachts, sails fully distended in the wind, race through massive undulating waves – their curves defined by pale outlines.

Apart from the spontaneous small oils on board evoking seaside delight, Howson's depictions may be thought of as the observed world transfigured through creative ruminations. Every shape, colour and motif has been carefully composed to produce aesthetic outcomes. The utilisation of a two-dimensional format with extraneous detail pared away encourages the viewer to relate to the subtle compositional relationships at play within the works. The scumbling of multiple layers of oil pigment into coarsely textured Belgian linen generates Howson's signature, atmospheric portrayals.

JACQUELINE HOUGHTON