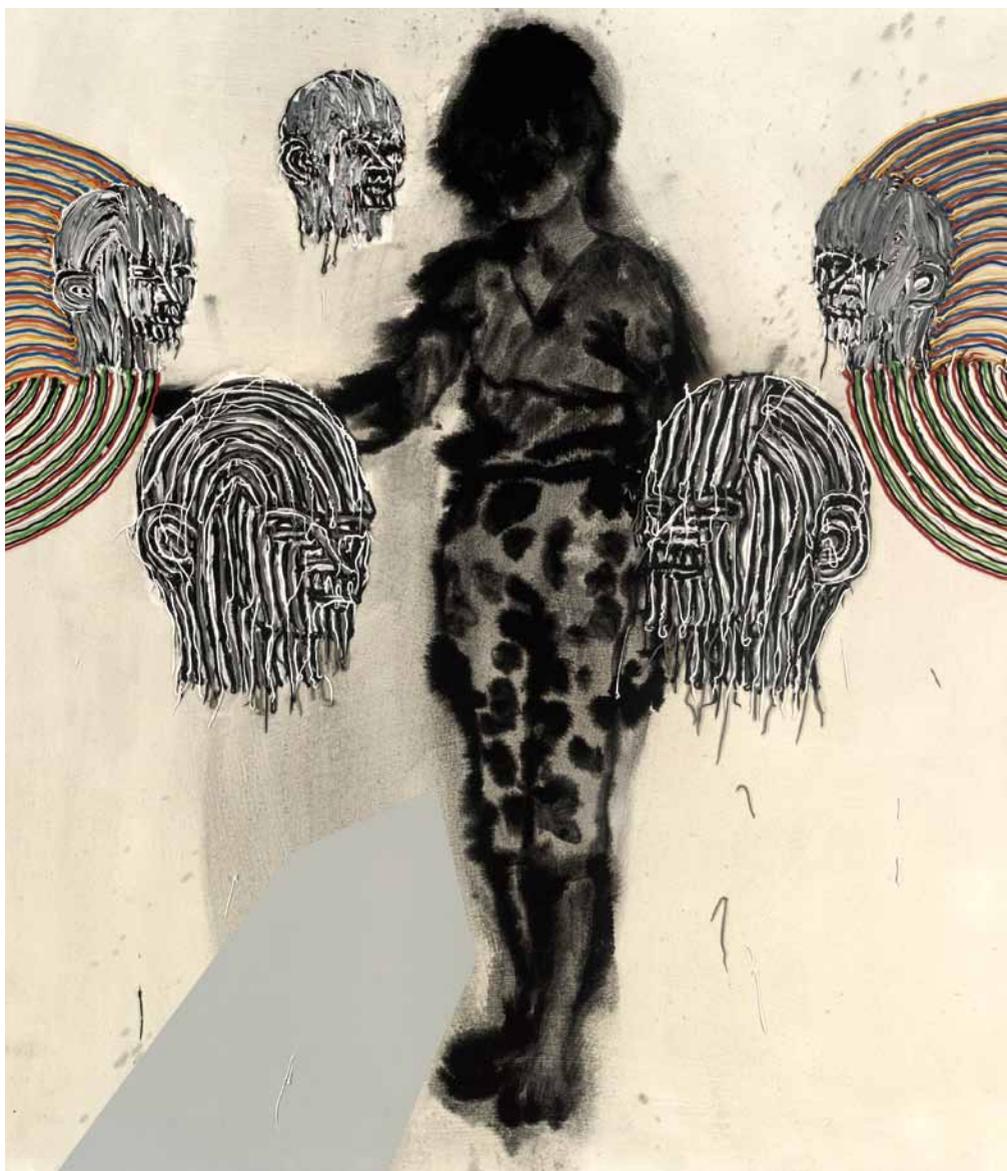
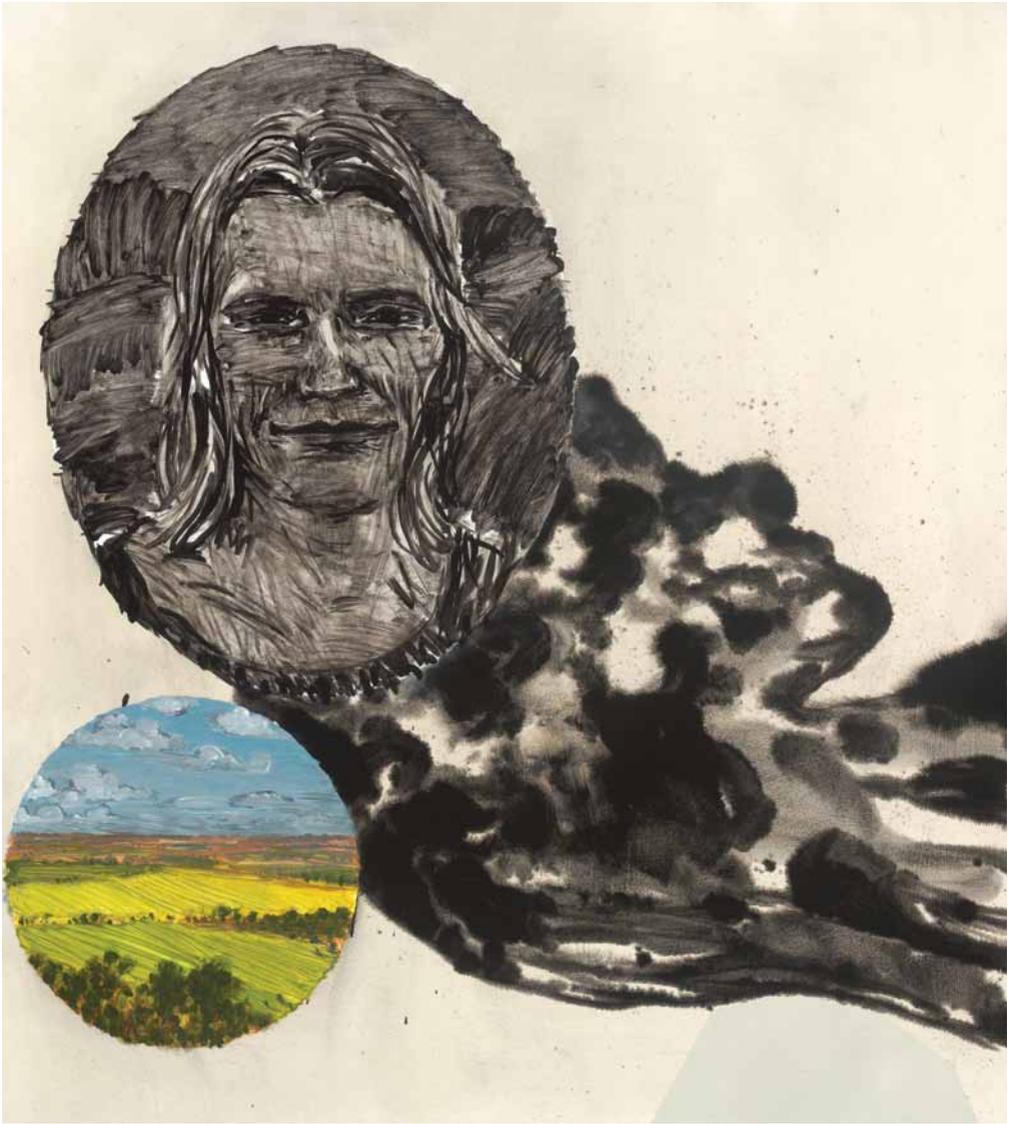


ALAN JONES *WYALKATCHEM*





## AUSTRALIAN DADA

At its heart, Alan Jones' latest body of work is a celebration. Hints of introspection, via self-portraiture, float through his work, but so does an embracement of family, of environment and of the future.

Jones' work has always been about notions of identity; what it is that makes up a person's idiosyncracies, what it is that formulates an individual. In this regard he is a highly personalised artist and there is always a strange sense of urgency about these proceedings, as though if he doesn't get them down, and fast, they will slip away into the mists of time.

These are works that embrace the past, the present and the future simultaneously; creating a strange time zone that encompasses Jones' own childhood with a future childhood. In a singular canvas Jones depicts his partner, Brooke, the fledgling form of their 19 week old not-yet-born child alongside an almost formal landscape from his youth. It could be read that the landscape – that of Wyalkatchem where he wandered as a toddler – is the past. Brooke is very much the present and the forming child is the future. In this singular canvas he balances time, embracing the past and the contemporaneous in a stylistic tango that ranges from the stylistically formal to gentle abstraction.

At times these portraits are casual; a knockabout bloke in a short-sleeved shirt just leaning against a wall (Jones' father). But at others they are little short of hallucinatory; figures being contemplated by floating heads. A child-like figure, clearly a self-portrait, is similarly considered by these heads – an adult Alan Jones peering back towards his younger self who in turn is escaping into memories of far-away innocence in the form of Bert and Ernie from Sesame Street, his cuddly friends from childhood.

Jones' floating heads first appeared circa 2006 when the artist moved back to the town of Windsor on the outskirts of Sydney near where he grew up. Jones admits that at the time he was experiencing a degree of disorientation in his life and was seeking a way to anchor himself in his new environment. At the time his was a world of internal conflict, a time to find a way to demonstrate an emotional connection and presence to his subjects.

After many experiments, that tool came in the form of two small floating black and white heads staring at each other amidst the environs of Windsor. The heads were clearly in a mode of debate, perhaps pondering the merits, or lack thereof, of his predicament, self-created avatars that could contemplate and discuss the past, present and future.

The heads remain an ongoing motif in Jones' oeuvre. In his most recent work they may contemplate the 'self' in the form of a younger Alan Jones and they often bear witness on more contemporaneous situations.

The images in *Wyalkatchem* are sourced from family photos. The works in general have a somewhat surreal air; they are works about memory and nostalgia and as such they have a weird kinship to the trend of spirit photography that gripped the Europe post World War II – the 'accidental' capturing of a lost one via photography. The notion of discovering the presence of the dead via this technique

became a major fad and was supported strongly by the Spiritualist movement.

These are not, thankfully, works about the dead. In fact they are works very much about the living. Indeed they are works created by an artist who was on the verge of becoming a father, a period that inspires pause, contemplation, love and introspection.

The landscape, for all that it stands out in a figurative sense, is in many ways, the cornerstone of this exhibition. When the artist was little more than a toddler, Jones' parents owned and ran the one and only pub in a town with the strangely spooky name of Wyalkatchem which sits about 200km north-east of Perth. While it is known that Wyalkatchem is an Aboriginal word and refers to the near-by waterhole, it is evidently unknown what it exactly means, a fact that bodes poorly for the fate of the local indigenous people and may go some way to explaining the somewhat haunted nature of these works (the locals call it "strange name, beaut place").

Wyalkatchem is a small weather beaten wheatbelt town. When Jones and his parents and two brothers lived there in the late '70s the population of the town was around 650. As is the fate of so many rural towns, the population is diminishing and, when Jones and his father Mike revisited the town last August with the intent purpose of researching for this exhibition, it was down to around 350 people.

Central to the town, naturally enough, is the pub. It is a typically rambling affair, painted with a dry deep red hue (which gives it that slightly ominous feeling of the famous chalet in *The Shining*), but despite that fact it is a welcome sight to both locals and travellers alike. Inevitably walking into the pub brought back a flood of memories for Jones' father and a strange sense of home-coming for the artist, who no doubt imagined bringing his own progeny to the pub in years to come.

And here, in the gallery, if not a perfect replica (Jones is not that kind of anally retentive artist!) alongside the family who lived there, is The Pub, an icon of Aussie Dada brought to life.

The works in *Wyalkatchem* combine both nostalgia and optimism. They are linked by both family and environment, co-joined by the floating heads which capture Jones' attempts to situate himself in both the past and the future and which bear witness to the machinations of time and memory.

And at the time of writing the Jones clan were sitting in the studio – whether literally or figuratively (they were, after all, sitting there on the canvases) awaiting a new family member who, no doubt, will be the subject of many paintings to come.

Ashley Crawford, Freelance curator and writer 2011



## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Embracing diversity, Alan Jones primarily works between painting and sculpture and takes a very personal approach to subject matter. Jones aims to communicate to the viewer the intricacies of human connections and relationships and how his own roots subsequently influence his practice.

Jones has been awarded a number of significant prizes including the prestigious *2008 Paddington Art Prize* and most recently the *2011 Fisher Ghost Art Award*. Jones has also been a finalist in prominent exhibitions such as the *Sulman Prize* at the Art Gallery of NSW and the *2011 Black Swan Prize*, Perth.

Over the past decade Jones has held thirteen solo exhibitions and has been involved in over ninety group exhibitions throughout various commercial, regional and state galleries. Jones has travelled extensively within Australia and overseas receiving the Inaugural *Pat Corrigan Travelling Art Scholarship* in 1997 and the prestigious *Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship* in 2004. His works have been acquired by a number of important public collections including Artbank, Macquarie Group, Maitland Regional Art Gallery and the Gold Coast City Art Gallery.

Jones' work has been covered in many major publications, including *Art & Australia*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian* and *Artist Profile*.

## EXHIBITION DATES 18 November – 23 December 2011

The Janet Holmes à Court Artist Grant is a NAVA initiative, made possible through the generous sponsorship of Janet Holmes à Court and the support of the Visual Arts Board, Australia Council for the Arts.

Cover: *Mum 1980*, 2011, oil on canvas, 153 x 138 cm

Leaf: *Brooke 2011*, 2011, oil on canvas, 153 x 138 cm

Inside Right: *Wyalkatchem 1980*, 2011, oil on canvas, 153 x 138 cm

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