

MICHAEL SIMMS

Finalist: Contemporary Art Awards 2017

On the Periphery

By Annette Ong

Australian painter Michael Simms (b.1987) creates work that is strikingly realistic. A finalist in the *Contemporary Art Awards 2017*, his painting *Weight* (2016) draws inspiration from American artist Andrew Wyeth's painting *Christina's World* (1948) and a recurring dream he had as a child. Upon viewing Wyeth's painting, he recalled visions of himself crawling naked in a field attempting to reach shelter before sunset but instead plunged into darkness.

The painting pays homage to Wyeth's original work but carries a distinct heaviness, expressed through the dark palette; an atmosphere of impending gloom. The placement of the subject in the foreground suggests his separation and longing, as he twists his body towards his destination in the far distance. There is a sense of urgency for the subject to return home to security and safety; yet, there is a significant divide for him to cross. His nakedness suggests exposure and vulnerability to the elements, both known and unknown. By referencing Wyeth's composition and reflecting on his own memory, Simms work demonstrates that vulnerability is intrinsic to the human condition.

Simms interest lies in the power of landscapes and their ability to shape our perspective and our place in the world. Another of Simms's paintings *Glimmer* (2016), suggests the same desire by casting a similar mood. There is no painted subject in *Glimmer* (2016) but perhaps the viewer is cast as the subject — standing on the periphery looking towards a sky dense with darkness, interrupted only by a slice of warm light. The light between the darkness suggests an aspect of deliverance — transportation from the past or present into the future — to leave behind

and move forward, towards hope and a sense of safety.

In both paintings, there is space to traverse: an unlit, unknown space. The landscape is vast, all-encompassing and all-consuming. Yet the use of light in both works

indicates the possibility of change; that over time, what is threatening can become familiar when or if revealed by light. The connection between humans and the land is thousands of years old, and Simms's work highlights this enduring relationship and its impact on our perspective.

Weight (2016) and *Glimmer* (2016) comment on the variability of the natural world: a world, governed as it is, by forces that are at times, relenting at times relentless. The unpredictability of the environment works in conjunction with our own evolving personal perspective: both influence, alter and inform the other.

Michael Simms is an award-winning artist based in Sydney. He studied Fine Art at the Julian Ashton Art School and has been awarded the Cliftons Sydney Art Prize (2016) and the Cambridge Studio Gallery Portrait Prize (2016). He has been a finalist in many art awards including the Black-

town Art Prize, the Calleen Art Award (2016), the Black Swan Prize for Portraiture (2016) and Contemporary Art Awards (2017).

On this page, *Weight* (2016), oil on wooden panel, 50 x 60cm and *Glimmer* (2016), oil on wooden panel, 21 x 29cm.

Image courtesy of the artist

Michael Simms work can be viewed at www.michaelsimmsart.com

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