

IM·AG·ING



JOHN HOCKINGS

im·ag·ing [i-mi-jin](#)

: the action or process of using specialized techniques to produce an image of something that is not visible to the naked eye

In the ten years since returning to full-time painting, my work has moved across evolving ideas as I've explored just where my interest in painting and art might now lie. I've found that process quite interesting. For thirty years my work has been representational, always referencing some particular person/s or place. Over that time the works have varied in their literalness, realism – call it what you will. Those terms are loaded but don't really need to be unpacked here. Some works are loose, some are tight. That is probably a better way to describe it. Often the looser have been described as semi-abstract or abstract even, but to me, thinking about it now, that is incorrect. Even the loosest of the works over the last years have been rooted in realism and representation, and always have been made in reference to the visual world around me as I see it. That's not abstract to me.

In a world where the creation of images is rampant, and where meanings are diverse and multiple, it's a tricky thing to be interested in image creation. My interest over the recent years has moved away from a couple of things. Firstly I have moved away from trying to portray a sense of place with landscape, from trying to uncover meaning through painting. It is a whole exercise in itself to understand a 'sense of place' as I discovered during forty years of making architecture. One could spend a lifetime just trying to apprehend 'the sense of place' of some environment. One could spend a second lifetime trying to describe that 'sense of place' via painting, or writing, or poetry, or performance. Is that 'sense' embodied in the landscape, or is it non-objective, personally or culturally defined, or both? If that's not clear, what is clear is that there's a double take involved. Firstly there's the apprehension, and then there's the representation of that apprehension. I have shifted away from having a primary interest with these concerns.

At the same time as I was making paintings drawn from the landscape of the Queensland coast, from Moreton Bay to Hinchinbrook Island, and from the landscaped gardens of central Japan, I was also making paintings/portraits of friends and family. It is still current to see a principal aim of portraiture as being to evoke or capture the essence of the sitter, to reveal something of their character or being. There is a parallel here to sense of place. All are supposedly qualities that are not immediately apparent, that are not so much concerned with surface appearance as they are with hidden and non-visual characteristics.

It became more apparent to me earlier in the figurative paintings than in the landscapes that I did not have any particular interest in representing the character of the subjects, nor in representing the circumstances of their lives. I wasn't trying to convey anything of what they were thinking about or were experiencing. My interest was in their appearance, and of the potential of that appearance to be represented in paint on canvas. And even more interesting to me was, in the making of the image, how might the paint look on the canvas – how might it be moved around, how tight or how loose should it be? What kind of image would be produced? Could the image be arresting in its own terms without reference to anything other than itself. No need to wonder about the subject, their mood, their feelings, just the impact of the image.

It wasn't much of a step to realise that actually my concern with landscape was similar. Perhaps I thought I was delving into sense of place but really my interest was as for my interest in the figurative subjects – what was the appearance of any landscape I experienced and what image might be made from that in paint on canvas?

So what happens next? Now more focussed on this idea, my interest indeed was not so much in defining what I was looking at, nor in how to bring that perception across into a painted image. It was rather, using that perceived image as a starting point, how could I explore the interaction of paint, brush and canvas to construct an image which could itself, by virtue of its painted qualities, become an image which was powerful and memorable. In other words, the perceived image had become just a starting point for the more interesting (to me) act of creating arresting imagery.

What brush or other implement, what paint, what movement, what density, what scale, what colour, and so on would work best?

In the recent works, I have mostly moved away from the more gestural paintings of a couple of years ago and set myself the challenge of making the works tighter, more defined, and more precise and importantly, less complex. The idea is not however to search for some kind of essence. Rather, it is an interest in the image as the presentation of a clear but brief moment of vision – a glimpse, a coup d'oeil, that is meant to be nothing more than a partial insight into something bigger that would always defy description.

John Hockings
September 2024

Cover image: *Kenroku-en* 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 90 cm



Kyoto Garden 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 50 × 60 cm



Rikugi-en Pines 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 40 × 40 cm



Pond Reflections Murin-an 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 75 × 60 cm



Autumn Path Heian Garden 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 90 × 60 cm



Rocks Kiyosumi Gardens 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 50 × 70 cm



View to the Beach Kingscliff 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 75 cm



A Gap in The Forest 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 40 × 80 cm

A selection of artworks from the exhibition 'im·ag·ing'.

Exhibition dates

8 October – 2 November 2024



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