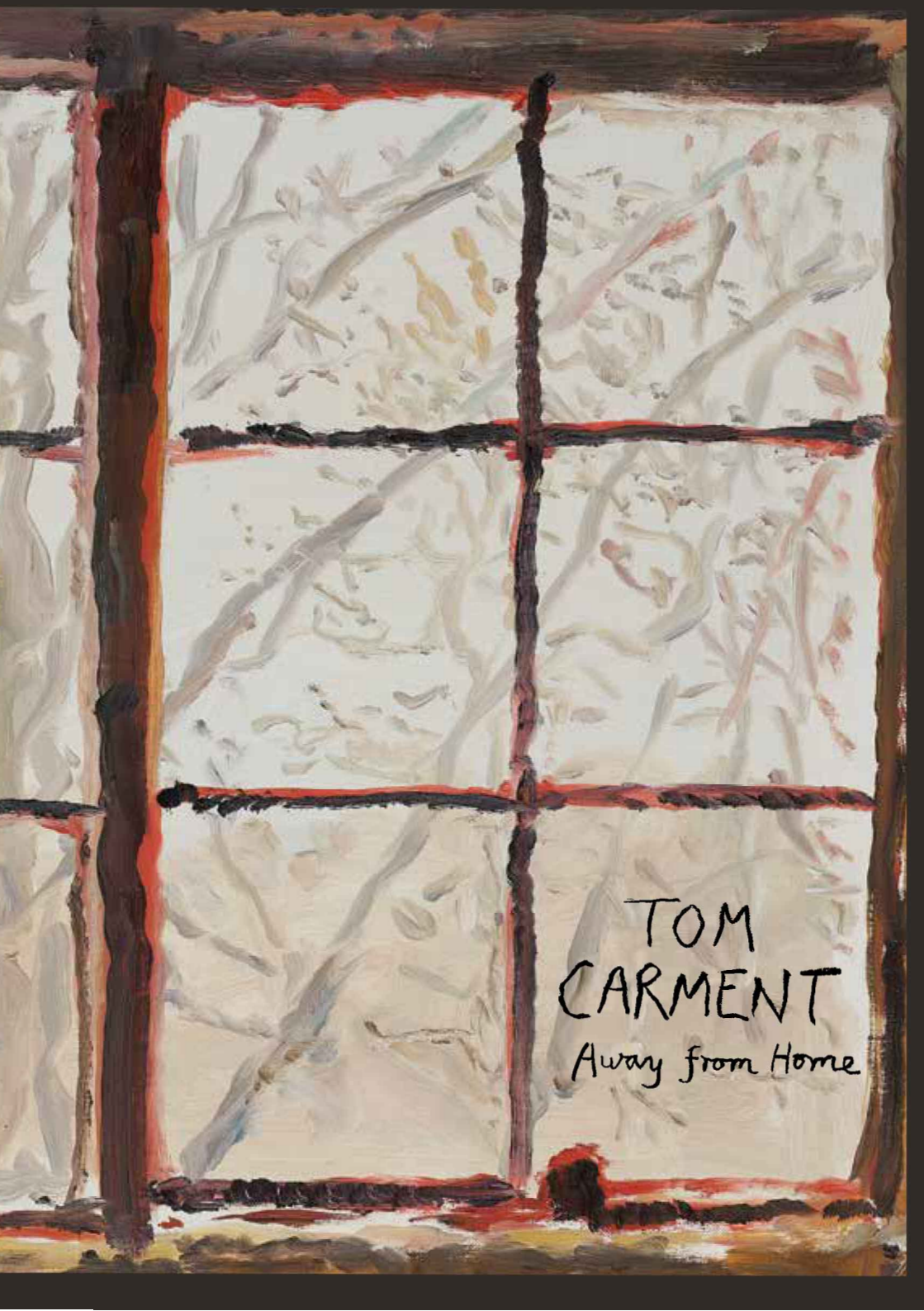
TOM
CARMENT
Away from Home

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EXHIBITION DATES: 29 OCTOBER – 23 NOVEMBER 2019

THIS EXHIBITION WAS PAINTED largely away from my home in Sydney. The January and winter of 2018 were spent in Marmion, a coastal northern suburb of Perth, looking after my partner Jan's elderly mother. This year, Jan and I moved to a small rented cottage in the Adelaide CBD.

In both these places the winter has been wet and windy, and I think my paintings reflect that. My friend Karl let me store some painting gear at a house in the Adelaide Hills, at Mt Lofty. Up here, I found good painting spots on the side of minor roads and, when it rained, took shelter inside the old garage, looking out at the misty landscape.

In July 2018, I went with the J. M. Coetzee Centre for Creative Practice to its Winter School in the dry umber hills of an old sheep station, *Oratunga*, in the Flinders Ranges.

I have spent time in Sydney too, where, during October and November last year, I took my watercolour backpack on the train each day to Marrickville, Sydenham and Hurlstone Park, searching for flowering jacarandas to paint. I travelled north of the city to make a series of pictures, looking out from the rocks at the Mooney Mooney rest area on the Hawkesbury River. I spent a long weekend at a friend's bushy property, *Torokina*, outside Mittagong. My series of typewriter still lifes, started in 2017, continued, in Perth and Sydney with five additional works.

Travelling to and from Adelaide by car, I stayed at Koroop with my friends on a buffalo dairy farm. It was the first time I had painted in that big-skied, flat country near the Murray River.

Unusually, in January and February of 2019, I took a complete break from painting, to concentrate on my writing – a collection of non-fiction stories and essays for a book with Giramondo Publishing, *Womerah Lane: Lives and Landscapes*. I wrote new pieces and refined old ones, the subjects ranging over the thirty-year period that Jan and I and our children have lived in our Darlinghurst house. From the lowest drawers of my plan cabinet I retrieved boxes of 35mm slides, searching for the right paintings and drawings to accompany my words. I borrowed old pictures from collectors and took them to be photographed.

I sent off my manuscript, then packed up our car and drove to Adelaide. In March, I went to a Modbury real estate agent to pick up the keys for our new cottage in Murrays Lane, whose cracked dark green walls and grey ceilings I plastered and painted a warm white – half-strength Chalk USA. I began exploring nearby landscapes. My life became simple again, uncluttered, and singularly focused. After having delved into the past for months, it was both refreshing and familiar to be painting and drawing again, looking outwards. I was enjoying this life in a new city, with Jan – away from home.

Rose's Olivetti in Don's shed, Perth 2018 oil on linen 41 x 51cm

Evening houselights, Marmion 2018 oil on linen 15 x 20cm

Bathers, Watermans Beach 2018 watercolour on paper 21 x 30cm

Winter sea, Sorrento 2018 oil on nine wood panels 15 x 19cm (average size)

Mary drawing 2018 pen and ink on paper 30 x 21cm

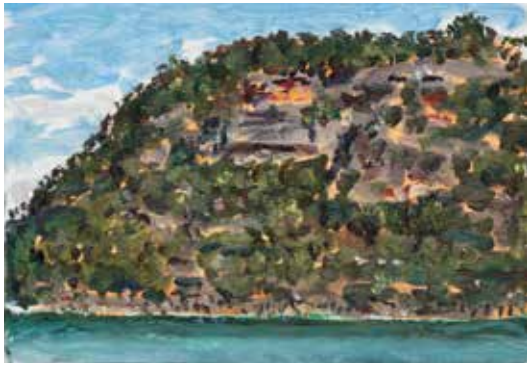
Mary's back door 2018 pen and ink on paper 21 x 30cm

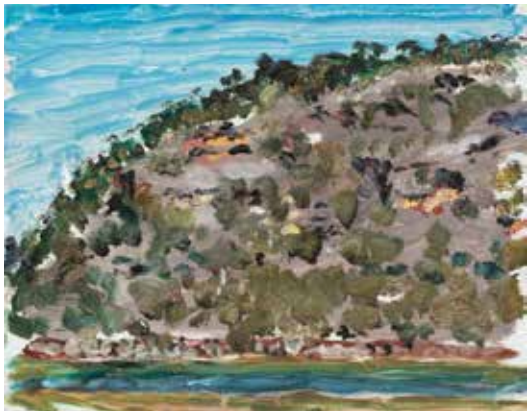
Marmion

EARLY EVERY MORNING, while her mother Mary lay sleeping in the front bedroom, Jan and I would put on jumpers and raincoats and follow a narrow service lane to the coast path by the West Coast Highway. We walked past both neat and unkempt backyards, morning magpies, lemon and pomegranate trees leaning over corrugated fences. We'd head north as far as Sorrento, with the pink dawn clouds and the Indian Ocean on our left.

During the day, if the weather was bad, we often sat around the dining table together. Mary would sew or do colouring-in, while I drew her portrait in pen and ink. Jan was working remotely, typing at her laptop. We sometimes passed a half hour like this in mutual concentration, with no conversation between us. Before I left the table I would show Mary my drawings and if she liked one her face would light up as she exclaimed, 'Oh wow Tom … you're so clever!' Her response was most encouraging to me.

On wild wet afternoons I packed my oil paints and some white-primed wood panels into Mary's dusty old Ford sedan and drove it out of the garage, to Sorrento. There was a section of the carpark there, next to the toilets, which afforded a clear view of the ocean. I crossed over to the passenger seat and laid old towels, my palette and brushes on the driver's seat, to paint the green-grey ocean and rough surf. I'd have to keep reaching across to flick the windscreen wipers as the big car rocked in the wind.





TOP *Muogamarra cliffs, Hawkesbury River I* 2018
oil on wood panel
18 x 26cm

MIDDLE *Muogamarra cliffs, Hawkesbury River III* 2018
oil on wood panel
16.5 x 21cm

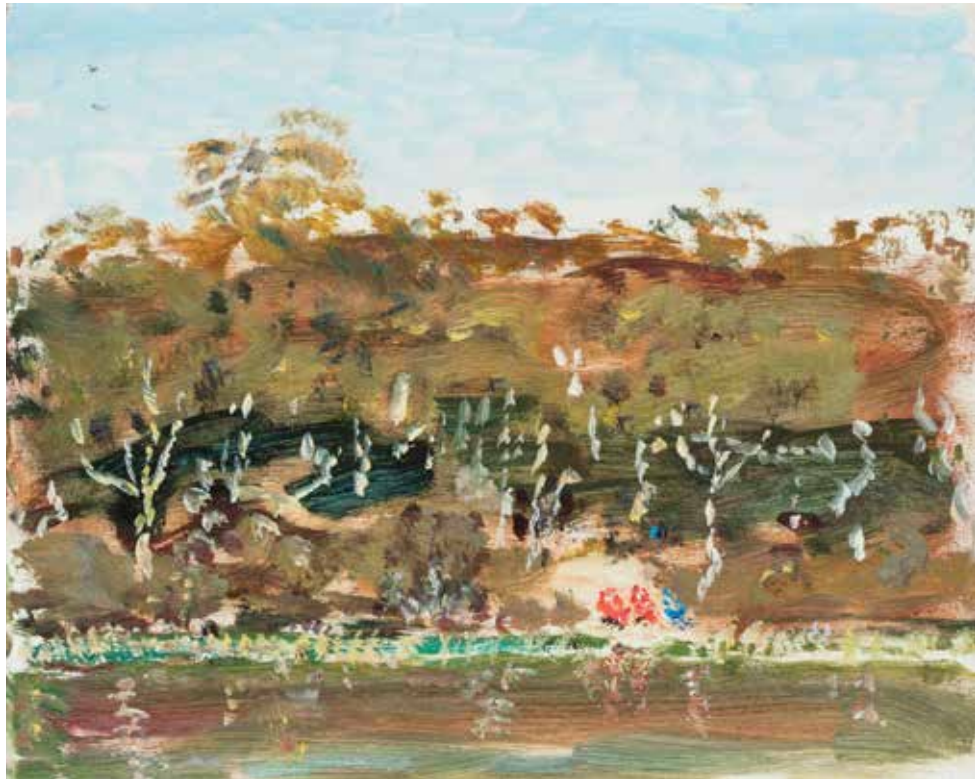
BOTTOM *Muogamarra cliffs, Hawkesbury River IV* 2018
oil on wood panel
15.5 x 20cm

Pontoon, Redleaf Pool 2018 gouache on paper 21 x 30cm

Jacaranda, Charlotte Avenue
Marrickville 2018
watercolour on paper
23 x 31cm

12. *Big eucalypt, Torokina II* 2018
oil on wood panel 15 x 19cm

Big eucalypt, Torokina I 2018
oil on wood panel 16 x 21cm



Red canoes, Torokina 2018 oil on wood panel 16 x 19cm

Off the Mallee Highway 2019 watercolour on paper 11.5 x 16cm

Caravan lights, Koroop 2018
oil on wood panel 13 x 18cm

Koroop

A LONG TIME AGO the family who had lived in the house where I was staying had a reputation in the district for being a bit accident prone. I read this in a book of local history called 'Old Koroop' that was sitting on the kitchen table. One family member had shot the other in the foot and a son had placed a four inch nail in the cream extractor to watch it spinning around. He lost an eye.

Koroop is about twenty kilometres south of the Murray River, between Swan Hill and Echuca. This area was more densely populated in the past when soldier settlers came here after World War II to scratch a living and raise their children on the small blocks of land that the government had allotted them. Now Koroop is just a neat weatherboard community hall with a tin roof, above the creek, rebuilt in the 1960s after the old one collapsed.

I was visiting my friends Wayde and Michelle, who both grew up nearby, close to the Murray River, and then spent many years working elsewhere. Now they've both returned to help their daughter and her husband on their buffalo milk farm, called 'Buffablow'. Michelle told me that she remembers going to dances in the Koroop Hall, where the local band 'The Gay Charmers' played regularly.

Three backpackers from Europe were staying across the paddock, in a cluster of caravans attached to an old house. They rose at 4am for the first milking, fulfilling their eighty-eight day rural visa requirements. One chilly morning, before dawn, I put my headlamp on and climbed up to the top of the dew-covered dam wall to do a small painting of caravan lights against the trees of the creek.

Wayde went off each day to bulldoze silage for the buffalos, and warned me to be careful when I crossed the electric fences. He showed me how to test if they were switched on, by using a blade of green grass to touch the wire: 'If you feel a tingle, watch out.'

Evening clouds, Koroop 2018 oil on wood panel 14 x 18cm

Back verandah, Koroop 2018 oil on wood panel 15 x 20cm

Calitris pine, Oratunga 2018 oil on paper 55 x 37cm

Stockyards, Oratunga II 2018 oil on wood panel 14 x 22cm

Oratunga

DURING THE WINTER of 2018 there had been almost no rain at Oratunga in the Flinders Ranges. To the despair of the locals, the country looked much like how Hans Heysen had depicted it eighty years before, umber and brown, but with more Callitris pines than in the days when the place was overstocked with merinos.

Not far from the shearers' kitchen I found a dead kangaroo hidden from view, fallen into a small concavity in the dry ground. Its eyes were still glassy and it didn't smell bad, but when I reached down to move the body it was surprisingly heavy. Rigor mortis had set in and its limbs were akimbo. I went to the shearers' quarters and found the poet Rachael Mead who helped me carry the kangaroo two hundred metres away, to a dry creek tributary. Unladen on my ambling return, I looked sideways through a fenceline at the ragged evening sky and went to fetch my paints.

In my bag for this journey I had placed an old plastic film canister alongside my tubes of oil paint. It was two-thirds filled with grey powder – my father's ashes. Five years previously, after the initial scattering of my parents' cremated remains in the harbour, I was given the wooden box which had contained those of my father. There was still some gritty ash left around its edges, and so I used a chisel to scrape it out. My father and I had shared a love of outback landscapes and I decided to take this remnant of his ashes inland, far from the sea. Over four days of painting at Oratunga I searched for a place he would have liked and decided on a small valley near the homestead turn-off. I went there in the late afternoon, the long shadows of the small pines on the ridge giving it a blue-green appearance. I flipped open and upended the canister. A grey cloud drifted sideways and settled softly on the rocks and bushes.

Paddock gate at noon, Oratunga 2018 watercolour on paper 19 x 29cm

Morning cloud, Oratunga 2018 oil on wood panel 14.5 x 18.5cm

Morning frost, Oratunga 2018 oil on wood panel 15 x 18.5

Treetops, Mount Lofty I 2019
oil on wood panel 19 x 30cm

TOP *Treetops, Mount Lofty II* 2019 oil on wood panel 21 x 30cm
MIDDLE *Treetops, Mount Lofty III* 2019 oil on wood panel 21 x 30cm
BOTTOM *Treetops, Mount Lofty IV* 2019 oil on wood panel 21 x 30cm

Fireplace, Murrays Lane 2019 charcoal on paper 30 x 38cm

Mt Lofty

MT LOFTY IS THE WETTEST place in South Australia and often in the clouds. The house I visit there was burnt down in the 1983 bushfires, and rebuilt afterwards on the same footprint, inside the remaining, charred stone walls. It has lain unoccupied now for a decade since the illness and death of the owners, my friend Karl's parents. His father was from Germany, his mother from Latvia. They terraced the large garden and made winding stone-lined paths, planting it with firs, chestnut trees, flowering shrubs and fruit trees. Their collection of old musical instruments was lost in the fire. The garden has gone a bit wild now and the house needs a lot of repairs. Karl, who lives in Sydney, drives across to fix it up when he can leave his work.

I don't enter the main house, which has an alarm, but have left some painting gear in the kitchen. On wet days I've been painting from the open entrance and through the windows of the stone garage and woodshed, looking out at the rain. Having found this draughty but dry place to work from, I began, for the first time in my painting life, to welcome the bad weather. I put on a scarf and wool beanie and all the layers of warm clothing I owned.

Although the garden is now largely untended, the grass remains quite cropped. There's a big old male kangaroo who hangs out on the slope to the east of the house. He stands up tall and appears to be flexing his shoulder muscles when I approach. His pelt is a bit patchy and scarred. We stare at each other for a while, until I walk away and he eventually slumps heavily back down under a favourite tree.

Through the garage windows, Mount Lofty II 2019 oil on linen 45 x 56cm

Through the garage windows, Mount Lofty III 2019 oil on linen 45 x 56cm

Sprigg Road II 2019 oil on wood panel 22.5 x 27cm

Orchard shed, Piccadilly Road I 2019 oil on wood panel 19 x 25cm

TOP *Sprigg Road I*
2019 oil on wood panel
15 x 20cm

MIDDLE *Burning off, Piccadilly Road* 2019
oil on wood panel
15 x 18cm

BOTTOM *Fenceline, Norton Summit Road*
2019 oil on linen
15 x 20cm

Bike in the hallway, Murrays Lane II 2019 charcoal on paper 49 x 38cm

TOP *Winter tree, Gouger Street I* 2019 charcoal on paper 15 x 21cm
BOTTOM *Behind Gouger Street* 2019 charcoal on paper 21 x 30cm

TOP *Two Chow* 2019
oil on wood panel
21 x 30cm

MIDDLE *Three Tommy Ruff* 2019
oil on wood panel
21 x 30cm

BOTTOM *Chow* 2019
oil on wood panel
21 x 30cm

Snapper 2019 oil on wood panel 21 x 30cm

Murrays Lane

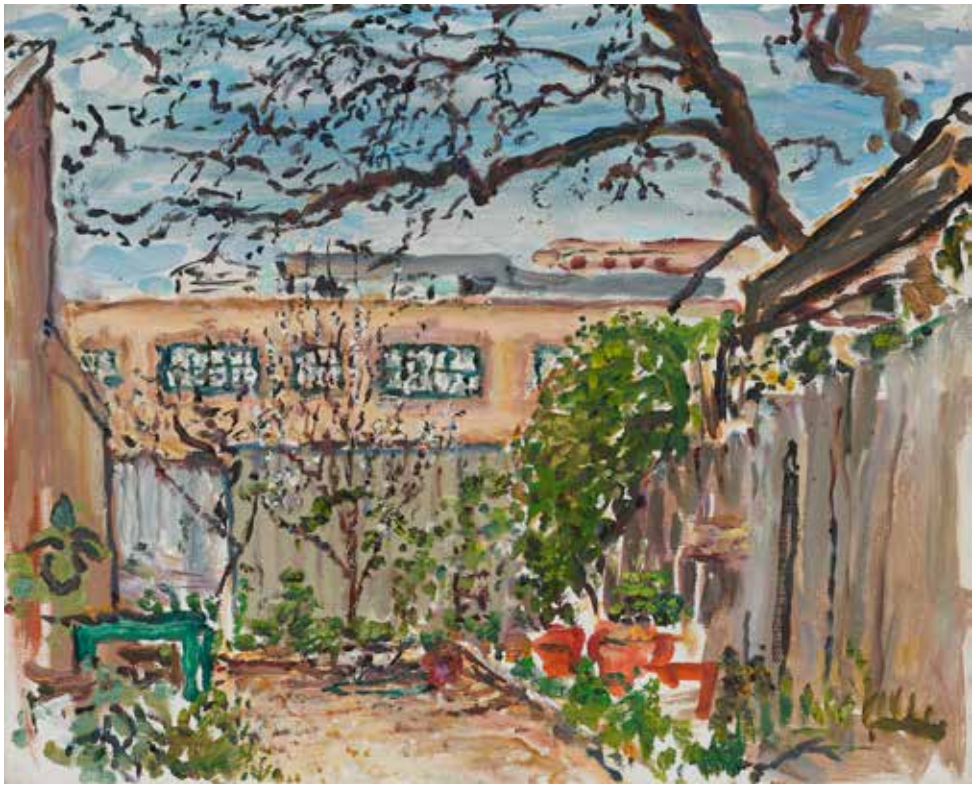
THE BACKYARD OF OUR RENTED one-bedroom cottage in Murrays Lane has a couple of metres of clear roofing jutting out over it. On wet days we hang the washing beneath it and I keep my oil paints and olive oil tin full of brushes on a set of shelves against the wall within its shelter. Each morning, after coffee at the Adelaide Central Markets, I return here and refresh the blobs of paint on my wooden painting palette, scraping it back with a chisel once a week. At the fishmongers in the Markets I noticed that the best-looking small whole fish are often the cheapest, the ones labelled Chow and Tommy Ruff. I brought some home to paint, placing them on a plank of old skirting board in the good light under the plexiglass roof.

Through the wooden gate at the side of our house there's a narrow gravelled passageway where our next door neighbour Tanya has constructed a beautiful community garden. As I paint in our yard I often hear the small children playing just outside and adult neighbours gossiping and taking food scraps to the compost. The magpies and doves scrabble their claws on the roof above me.

The fishmonger at the markets often asks if I want my modest purchase cleaned and gutted, but I reply, 'No thanks.' The other day when he looked puzzled at my refusal, I added, 'I'm painting them you see, for a still life … If I'm quick enough we'll eat them for dinner.' Jan is not so keen on that idea and says I should allot my fish painting sessions to the day before garbage night.

Paddock near the sea, Middleton 2019 oil on wood panel 21 x 30cm

TOP *Afternoon surf, Middleton II* 2019 oil on wood panel 14 x 18cm
BOTTOM *Afternoon surf, Middleton I* 2019 oil on wood panel 14 x 18cm



Tanya's community garden, Murrays Lane 2019 oil on linen 41 x 51cm

Fireplace, Murrays Lane 2019 oil on wood panel 14 x 23cm

View from the vacant lot, Gouger Street 2019 watercolour on paper 21 x 30cm

Misty tree, Mount Lofty 2019 oil on linen 51 x 41cm

Poker flowers outside the kitchen, Mount Lofty 2019 oil on linen 56 x 45cm

Published by Tom Carment
and the King Street Studios P/L
on the occasion of the exhibition
Tom Carment,
Away From Home

ISBN 978-0-9925716-4-1

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Photography:
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Design: Andrea Healy

This catalogue is a selection
of the works in this exhibition.
To view all the pictures,
and Tom Carment's CV, go to
the King Street Gallery website.
To view Tom's archive go to
www.tomcarment.com

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