



# CASTING LIGHT

A survey of the work of  
Paul S Miller

Grace Cossington Smith Gallery and Abbotsleigh are  
delighted to open the 2018 exhibition program with  
a survey exhibition from the artist Paul S Miller.

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Cover:

*Angel (4) The messenger, 2007, watercolor on paper, 58 cm x 77 cm*

Opposite:

*Self portrait - waiting to draw my first breath, 2017, pastel on paper, 50 cm x 141 cm*

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# CASTING LIGHT

A survey of the work of  
Paul S Miller

Curated by Nick Vickers

23 January to 24 February 2018



## Casting Light

### A survey of the work of Paul S Miller

Paul S Miller journeyed to Australia from Bathurst, New Brunswick, Gloucester County, on the shores of the Baie des Chaleurs in Canada to undertake a Masters of Fine Arts at the University of Tasmania. His exhibition 'Casting Light: A survey of the work of Paul S Miller' covers six distinct stages in this artist's phenomenal output of portraits, landscapes, watercolours, drawings, ceramics, and autobiographical reminiscences of his youth on the 46th parallel, on the Canadian shores of the Atlantic Ocean.

His most recent works are the result of more than 10 years of research into the traditional medium of egg tempera. But far from traditional, Paul Miller has used this medium to create a series of poignant, nocturnal still life studies where the artist shares some deeply personal insights into his life as well as a number of extraordinary works on wooden panels that, because of the exacting nature of the medium, have taken more than three years to complete. The nocturnes that feature in this exhibition comprise a small selection of works from a previous exhibition in 2017 'SMALL MATTERS, night paintings' that prompted the comment by one of the artist's Canadian friends '...a stillness that requires us to be so still.' Cyrille Godin.

*The murmur of winter seeds*, 2017, egg tempera on panel, 25 cm x 30 cm

*The distant echo of winter bees*, 2017, egg tempera on panel, 25 cm x 30 cm

*Within the forest secret flowers bloom*, 2017, egg tempera on panel, 25 cm x 30 cm

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The key work *A Cold Day for a Bush Picnic (after McCubbin)* sits at the centre of the exhibition; a self portrait of the artist with his wife Juliette, along with another couple beside an open fire that captures a mixture of physical and emotional temperatures.

The fire extends its brilliance and warmth to the closing of the day. The artist looks back at the viewer as smoke swirls around him and his gaze, with a slightly cocked eyebrow, seems to assertively beg the viewer to make of this scene what they may. His companions sit by the fire in the heart of the countryside where sparks from the briar and bracken are caught in a crackling moment of conviviality. The most distant figure proffers a glass, raised after a thirsty mouthful of wine. Yet, as a perplexing counterpoint to this dramatic work, the other two seated figures seem to pensively stare into the distance, lost in thought.

In many ways the artist is removed from the group, the swirl of the smoke seems to threaten to envelope and sweep him upwards. The absence of a chair creates a sense of separation as he places himself in the foreground on the near side of the flame. Unlike Paul Miller's other self portraits, this painting places the artist into the heart of a narrative where four friends pile into a big old six cylinder workhorse for an early evening picnic. The vehicle that features in the background of the painting typifies country life from a distant era and more than likely knows its own way to this favoured location.



Three other self portraits place the artist amongst his peers, John Kelly, Stephen Hall, Idris Murphy and the artist's beloved muse, Juliette. An artist amongst artists, Paul Miller reflects upon his position not only within the Australian art world but also at a stage in his life where he allows himself some deep introspection. He shares his thoughts in a digitised version of 100 pages from his diary, where drawings, poems and musings sit candidly side by side in an absorbing autobiographical insight into his daily ruminations.

Clockwise from top left:

*Juliette*, 2015, egg tempera on panel, 30 cm x 30 cm

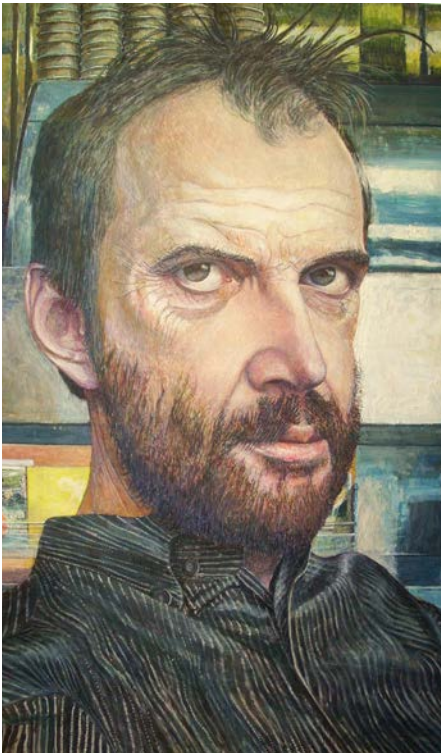
*From Dobell's window, John Kelly with big red*, 2016, egg tempera on panel, 66 cm x 126 cm

*Idris Murphy*, 2012, watercolour on paper, 78 cm x 69 cm

*Stephen Hall*, 2011, egg tempera on panel, 90 cm x 120 cm

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Paul Miller's own interpretations of the figure in the landscape begin with *Tim's Land* and end with his enigmatic award winning *Batboy*. *Tim's Land* refers back to *A Cold Day for a Bush Picnic (after McCubbin)* and *Turon River* in central western New South Wales where the scene for the picnic is based. These daylight depictions of that particular landscape offer a more literal interpretation and link closely to the trilogy of ink drawings on paper in this exhibition. But *Batboy* is a visual triumph in egg tempera that captures the hopes and feelings of a multitude of aspiring young superheroes. *Batboy* stands with hands on hips and takes on all would be challengers. He is that figure in the landscape who defies derision and seems to have literally just landed, if only in his own imagination, straight out of the land of superheroes.





Opposite  
*Tim's Land*, 2015, egg tempera on panel, 120 cm x 90 cm

Above  
*Batboy*, 2013, egg tempera on panel, 150 cm x 120 cm

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The gaps between these bodies of work are like the thoughtful pauses in a good conversation. Somehow, another link is formed and the time machine jumps back 10 years to Paul Miller's reminiscences of his youth in Bathurst, New Brunswick and the important influence on his work of the Canadian group of artists known as the Maritime Realists. Tom Forrestall and Alex Colville swirl through the arctic mists and Paul Miller refers to this body of work as his 'Blue Angels'. The six works on paper that are a feature of this section of the exhibition allow the artist the space to transfer his thoughts into a form of ancient mysticism that transcends the boundaries of formal religions. Central to this lexicon of metaphors are the 'Blue Angels', whose lights in jam jars, strung from trees reference the souls of the people most dear to him. A dark bird drifting through a melancholic sky dips its wing to Paul Miller's mentor Alex Colville and continues an uncertain journey, a journey that is endlessly explored through the inhaling and exhaling of titanium white, ice cold air whilst emitting an extended frozen note that seems to emanate from a place that exists only in the imagination of an artist like Paul Miller.



That same solitary call seems to sweep across a small selection of ceramic sculptures, breathing into them a languid animation that awakens them from a frozen slumber. Books and petals, maps and star charts have found preservation amongst these thoughtful figures that are often representations of the artist's father, a man whose melancholic nature forced him into his own reclusive solitude; a man whose enormous hands become symbolic of his life's labour. These are the works where Paul Miller explores more of his own memories and where he is able to set to right the wrongs of his own fractured childhood. They are also the works that represent a daisy-chain of inspiration that allows the artist to demand of the viewer that they walk a rickety pier above a swollen ocean, abandon all formal knowledge of aesthetics and indulge in an emotional transfer that may result in more questions to which the artist may be incapable of providing answers.

*Father with stool, clams and leaves, (two views)* 2004, 30 cm x 19 cm x 45 cm, paperclay

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It is most certainly through the aforementioned fantastical explorations into nocturnes, ceramics and 'Blue Angels' that Paul Miller is able to confront a notion of understanding that his affliction with Parkinson's Disease is that swirl of smoke that threatens to envelop him in a bush picnic. Perhaps it is that light in the jar that is the illumination of the 'blue angel' who, after all, is the alter ego of the artist himself and he who has become the keeper of his own soul.

Nick Vickers

*Self Portrait – The brightest light shines in the darks shadows, 2017, ink and gouache on paper, 73 cm x 166 cm*

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## The works

*Cold Day for a Bush Picnic (after McCubbin)*, 2017, egg tempera on panel, 120 cm x 180 cm

*Self Portrait – waiting to draw my first breath*, 2017, pastel on paper, 50 cm x 141 cm

*Boundary tree – Frenchs Forest*, 2017, egg tempera on panel, 100 cm x 110 cm

*Lane way toward the town*, Bowral, 2017, watercolour on paper, 115 cm x 87 cm

*Paul S. Miller – Self Portrait thinking about Rembrandt*, 2017, pastel on paper, 81 cm x 100 cm

*Bowral Laneway*, 2017, watercolour on paper, 74 cm x 59 cm

*Self Portrait – The brightest light shines in the darks shadows*, 2017, ink and gouache on paper, 73 cm x 166 cm

*Within the forest secret flowers bloom*, 2017, egg tempera on panel, 25 cm x 30 cm

*The murmur of winter seeds*, 2017, egg tempera on panel, 25 cm x 30 cm

*The distant echo of winter bees*, 2017, egg tempera on panel, 25 cm x 30 cm

*Irish lullaby*, 2017, egg tempera on panel, 25 cm x 30 cm (courtesy Nick Vickers)

*Beneath a Da Vinci moon*, 2017, egg tempera on panel, 30 cm x 25 cm

*The light beyond a morning window*, 2017, egg tempera on panel, 30 cm x 25 cm

*In the shadow of sleeping memories*, 2017, egg tempera on panel, 15 cm x 15 cm

*Tilt*, 2017, egg tempera on panel, 20 cm x 15 cm

*Anne*, 2016, egg tempera on panel, 33 cm x 39 cm

*The new pastoral*, 2016, watercolour on paper, 101 cm x 140 cm

*From Dobell's window, John Kelly with big red*, 2016, egg tempera on panel, 66 cm x 126 cm

*Road Work – Frenchs Forest*, 2016, egg tempera on panel, 65 cm x 132 cm

*Juliette*, 2015, egg tempera on panel, 30 cm x 30cm

*Tim's Land*, 2015, egg tempera on panel, 120 cm x 90cm

*Malcolm Smith*, 2015, egg tempera on panel, 51 cm x 57cm

*Boys Car abandoned*, 2014, watercolour on paper, 104 cm x 76 cm

*Bent trees – spring flood*, 2014, watercolour on paper, 117 cm x 71 cm

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*Tall Trees in Glenorie*, 2014, watercolour on paper, 93 cm x 142 cm

*Bathurst Air Strip*, 2014, watercolour on paper, 116 cm x 76 cm

*After the Flood – river debris*, 2014, ink on paper, 105 cm x 76 cm

*Juliette in the bush – yellow box*, 2014, ink on paper, 105 cm x 76 cm

*Tim in the Gully*, 2014, ink on paper, 105 cm x 76 cm

*Greg Warburton*, 2014, egg tempera on panel, 36 cm x 45 cm

*Turon River*, 2014, watercolour on paper, 116.5 cm x 47cm

*Night Garden*, 2014, watercolour on paper, 236 cm x 77 cm

*Batboy*, 2013, egg tempera on panel, 150 cm x 120 cm, (Courtesy Tim Stokes and Anne Vella)

*Idris Murphy*, 2012, watercolour on paper, 78 cm x 69 cm

*Ross Harvey*, 2011, watercolour on paper, 74 cm x 101 cm

*Stephen Hall*, 2011, egg tempera on panel, 90 cm x 120 cm

*David Collins*, 2010, egg tempera on panel, 40 cm x 30 cm

*Angel (1) Keeper of souls*, 2007, watercolour on paper, 58 cm x 77 cm

*Angel (2) Seer of the distance dreams*, 2007, watercolour on paper, 58 cm x 77 cm

*Angel (3) Carrier of hope*, 2007, watercolour on paper, 58 cm x 77 cm

*Angel (4) The messenger*, 2007, watercolor on paper, 58 cm x 77 cm

*Angel (5) Waiting for the future*, 2007, watercolour on paper, 58 cm x 77 cm

*Angel (8) The tender of one's journey*, 2007, watercolour on paper, 58 cm x 77 cm

*Angel of birds*, 2004, 32 cm x 15 cm x 39 cm, paperclay

*Burden of beauty*, 2004, 23 cm x 32 cm x 27 cm, stoneware

*Father with stool, clams and leaves*, 2004, 30 cm x 19 cm x 45 cm, paperclay

*Figurine with fish on head*, 2004, 12 cm x 33 cm x 25 cm, paperclay

*Sleeping in the garden*, 2005, 23 cm x 32 cm x 27cm, paperclay

*The fisher man*, 2004, 16 cm x 30 cm x 31 cm, paperclay

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Gallery hours Monday to Friday 10 am-5 pm, Saturday 9 am-4 pm FREE ENTRY  
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