

JAMES DRINKWATER



**I LOVE YOU SO MUCH I CAN'T
STOP SAYING GOODBYE**

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY

19 OCTOBER TO 6 NOVEMBER 2021

I LOVE YOU SO MUCH I CAN'T STOP SAYING GOODBYE

There is a physicality in paintings by James Drinkwater also evident in footage of him at work in the studio. He attacks his surface with thrown paint, hits it with rags, slices with the palette knife and scrubs frenetically with fists. When he turns the painting upside down or on its side and declares it finished, there is a kind of head spin and theatrical presentation that takes Drinkwater's aesthetic into a subject matter that is driven by his life.

The intensity of his practice, which he characterises – hair on end, t-shirt and beard paint-encrusted – as “hammering away,” is prolific, with a powerful work ethic and a level of success to match. “When you are available, working away in the pits, you become a satellite and it, that special other, can visit.”

Drinkwater began drawing aged five, spending hours at Ron Hartree Art School in Newcastle as a teenager before going on to study at the National Art School in Sydney immediately after graduating high school. Early success saw him win the Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship in 2014. By then, he had already spent three years in Germany (2009–12), during which time the Marten Bequest Scholarship took him to Leipzig – and Kenya (2012). He also explored the Northern Territory in 2015, before the Whiteley Scholarship took him to Paris in the same year, after which he spent time working in Tahiti (2017). However, the decision that he (and partner Lottie Consalvo) made, to return to live and work in Drinkwater's hometown of Newcastle, is central to the narratives he draws on in his practice.

In a figurative expressionistic style, his painting, drawing and sculpture open into enigmatic narratives explored in series. In recent years, Drinkwater has delved into family stories, such as his mother's recollections of her grandfather in *Looking for Urchins and Louis Ferrari* (2018). Then a note from his son inspired *I Love You More than Paintings* (2020).



In Drinkwater's practice, the past, Australian art history and the world are pummelled into the present. Reflections about painting itself, the ability to explore a creative life unfettered, are writ large in his body of work in a style that conjures up iconic Australian painters (Gordon Shepherdson, Sidney Nolan, Margel Hinder, Grace Crowley, Fred Williams) – anyone, Drinkwater says, who “has that extra thing about the material.” There are also references to European and American artists – Lee Krasner, Pablo Picasso, Georg Baselitz, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, William Scott. Drinkwater describes his approach as post-ironic modernism. “That is the best description. Those guys are my heroes. I converse with them in my studio all day as I try to shed their influences. I talk so directly with them that I want them to come out.”

In 2019, a survey exhibition of Drinkwater's work was developed by Newcastle Art Gallery under the title *the sea calls me by name*. The show celebrated his connection to the coastal and industrial city he calls home, and the family heritage that drew him back. The biography explored in his work is defined by this place, discovered anew as his own two children become imprinted by Newcastle. This echo of the experiences Drinkwater had as a child decades earlier is visible in the layering, the subject matter, the resonation of place and pace in the paintings. Intriguingly, the exhibition includes work from as early as 2009. This earlier work is more abstracted, yet in colour and spatial sensibility pays homage to the artists who preceded and continue to inspire his practice – as does the Australian landscape.

In the catalogue essay for *the sea calls me by my name*, Anne Ryan writes that in Drinkwater's work we see “the primacy of the personal; [his] identification as an artist is parallel to his work, which is indivisible from his response to the world around him. More recently, as his family responsibilities have grown, the smaller orbit of family life has provided new inspiration for his work, finding the microcosms of intimate relationships and daily life to be infinite in their potential.”

Every work is a new stage on which Drinkwater's art life plays out, extending meaning and energy into other places, entering and exiting – the sea, the table, the studio. “All these things play out in those theatres; their stars are your loved ones. Intimacy becomes material and as relevant as a piece of clay.” It is palpable, this sense of Drinkwater in practice, in his place, echoing the past with the present and building a richness of personal and artistic influences from his version of the pits. An alchemy performed within the theatre of his studio.

extract from Louise Martin-Chew 'James Drinkwater: In the Pits' in *Vault*, issue 34, 2021, pp 46 - 51

Place the sea shells we found at my feet
across rock pools
diamonds are freckles on the sea
sun kissing your new cheeks

my shoulders will hold
until the girl is gone
how will you let me know?
when you enter the ages

So aim your bow into flowers
until Parnell's park lights turn on
you are a lamp upon my shoulders
when you are making your smashing star

You march in like a brass band
and I wonder if you know
tesoro bella
guitar strings decorate the column



I LOVE YOU SO MUCH I CAN'T STOP SAYING GOODBYE

My son Vincenzo said this to me at the Victorian iron school gates one clear winter morning. An excerpt from life which placed my heart in my mouth. This is probably the clearest example of how I work, a conception point which heralds a new group of paintings.



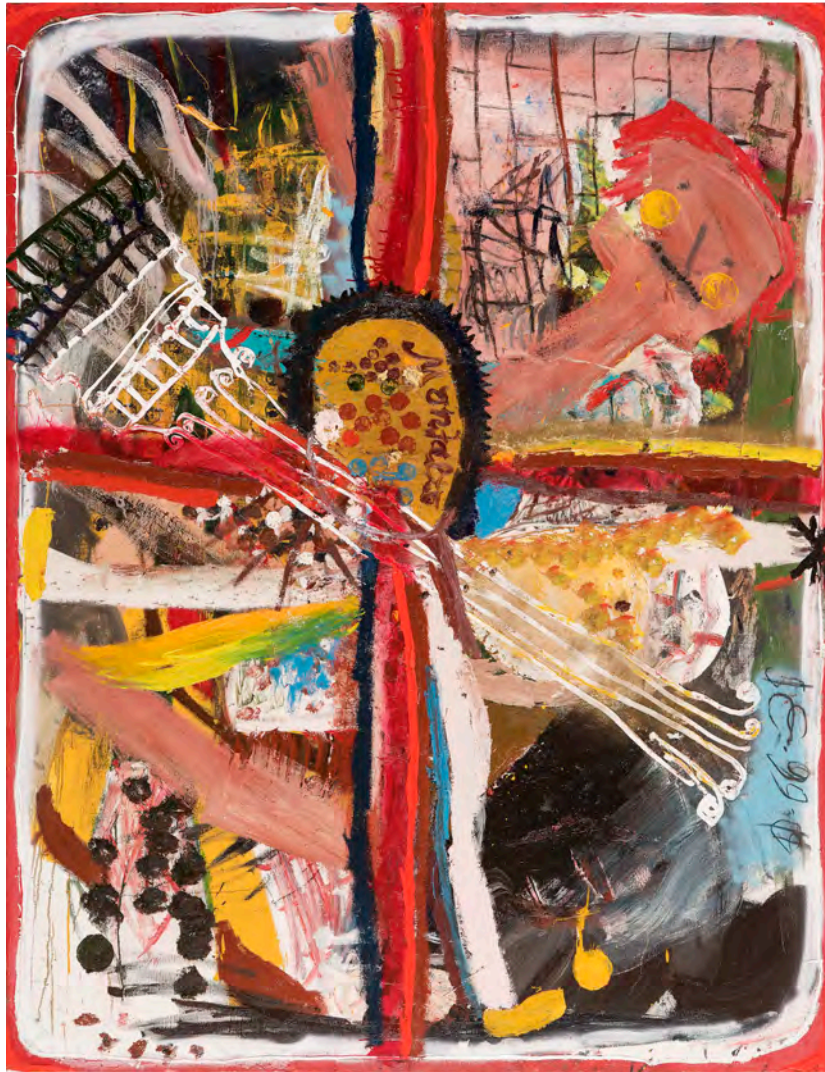
I AM A COLUMN. WITHOUT ME YOU ARE RUBBLE, WITHOUT YOU I AM ONLY DECORATION - I said to my family as the house was waking, the working harbour nearby sounding its horns. Columns like picture frames, like boats perform many functions ... protection, safety and aesthetics are all at play. A column has a decorative finessed veneer with a tough interior of stone, concrete and steel. They hold up structures and ensure the bundles are safe, for they need care.

My primary function is to preserve, protect and carry those that I love. I AM A SUPPORT, YOU ARE MY LIFELINE. I will hold my ground if you take a blow, I won't leave you to wreck and ruin.

James Drinkwater

September 2021

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JAMES DRINKWATER

I am a column

2021

oil, enamel and charcoal on linen

153 x 199 cm

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GALLERY



JAMES DRINKWATER

Place sea shells at my feet

2021

oil, enamel and charcoal on linen

199 x 153 cm

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THOMPSON
GALLERY



JAMES DRINKWATER

Parnell Park

2021

oil, enamel and charcoal on linen

160 x 150 cm

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GALLERY



JAMES DRINKWATER

Preservation II

2021

oil, enamel and charcoal on linen

123 x 155 cm

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY



JAMES DRINKWATER

Preservation

2021

oil, enamel and charcoal on linen

122 x 137 cm

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Can we go to the ocean baths?

2021

oil, enamel and charcoal on linen

122 x 137 cm

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JAMES DRINKWATER

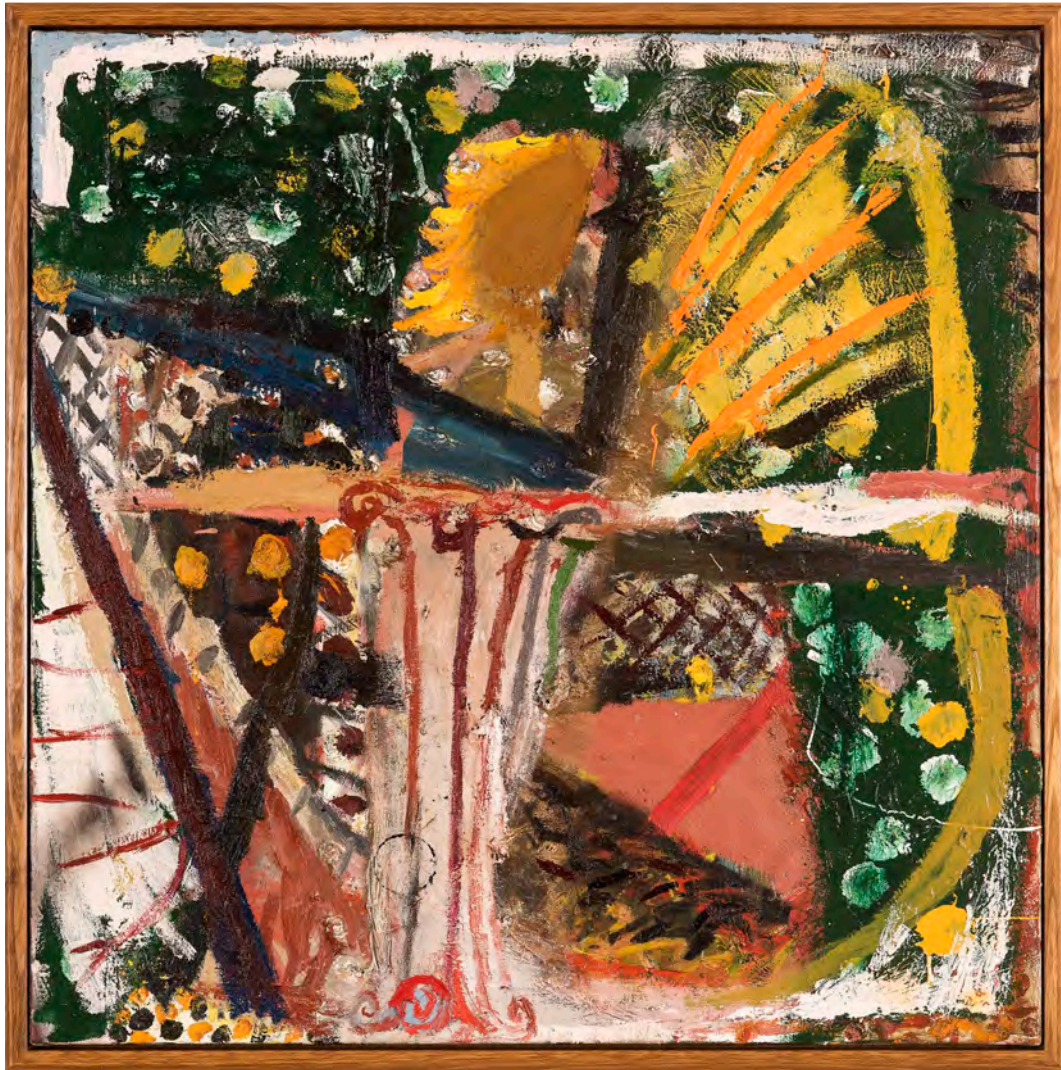
Not only cosmetic

2021

oil, enamel and charcoal on linen

122 x 137 cm

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THOMPSON
GALLERY



JAMES DRINKWATER

Aim your bow into flowers

2021

oil, enamel and charcoal on linen

110 x 110 cm

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THOMPSON
GALLERY



JAMES DRINKWATER

Sun kissing your new cheeks (study)

2021

oil and enamel on mirror and existing frame

134 x 107 cm

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Diamonds are freckles on the sea

2021

oil and enamel on hardboard

69 x 83 cm

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GALLERY



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One clear winter morning

2021

oil, enamel and charcoal on hardboard

44.5 x 100 cm

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Not only cosmetic (study)

2021

oil, enamel and brass on panel and handmade frame

71.5 x 61 cm

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GALLERY



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When Parnell Park lights turn on

2021

oil on mirror and existing frame

45 x 75 cm

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You are a lamp upon my shoulders

2021

oil, enamel and charcoal on hardboard

51 x 60 cm

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SHARK! ME! VINCENZO! (study)

2021

oil on hardboard

58.5 x 44.5 cm

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THOMPSON
GALLERY



JAMES DRINKWATER

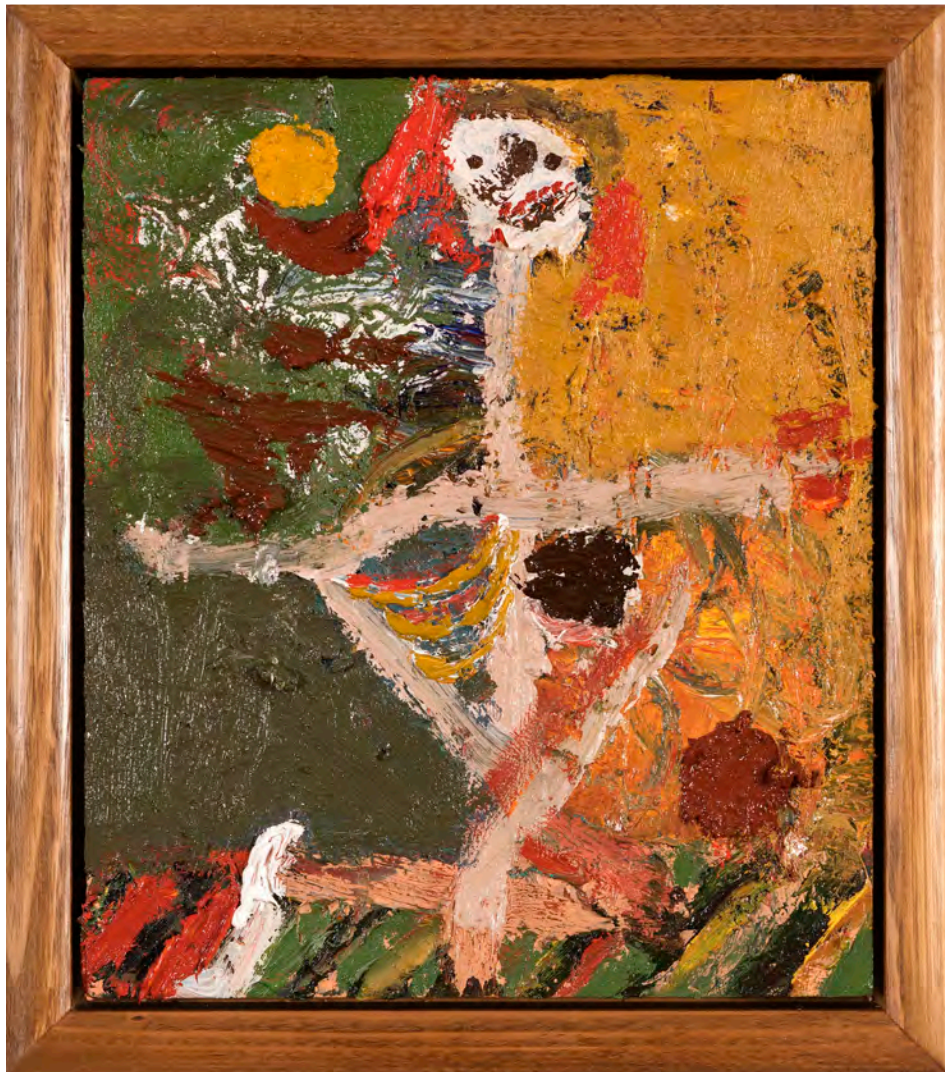
Can we go to the ocean baths (study)

2021

oil and enamel on hardboard and existing frame

43 x 53 cm

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In letting go

2021

oil on hardboard

35 x 30 cm

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Tesoro bello! (study)

2021

oil and enamel on mirror

53 x 45 cm

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Tesoro bella (study)

2021

oil and enamel on hardboard

30 x 30 cm

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JAMES DRINKWATER

Diamonds are freckles on the sea (study)

2021

oil on mirror

26 x 30.5 cm

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I LOVE YOU SO MUCH I CAN'T STOP SAYING

2021

brass plaque

30 x 30 cm



