

KEZ HUGHES



**THE WORLD IS DARK AND
FULL OF WONDER**

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY

2 TO 24 SEPTEMBER 2026

THE WORLD IS DARK AND FULL OF WONDER

Kez Hughes is a painter of tension. While her pictures might look still, solemn and perfectly poised, their precise brushstrokes and smooth surfaces belie a contest between oppositional romantic and realistic forces. Hughes brings these historically antagonistic tendencies together to examine the artificial gaze, turning perceptions of spectatorship and objecthood on their heads.

Hughes has no qualms working 'against nature' in pursuit of beauty. Out of time and out of place, her deracinated animals and contrived scenes share the poised construction of the diorama photographs of Hiroshi Sugimoto and Anne Zahalka. In these paintings, Hughes renders the landscape as more of a theatre set, a backdrop before which the silent dramas of the artist's surreal compositions unfold. Dürer's hare appears talismanic in *Magnificent*, while the bonsai conifer of *Tradition* sits out of scale, forming a grand island in an alpine lake. *Siren's* moth almost sits outside the painting, as if it has just alighted on the work's surface. "Nature is garrulous to the point of confusion," Paul Klee once wrote, imploring the artist to be "truly taciturn". By manipulating scale in such a fashion, Hughes' paintings problematise the received strategies of the sublime landscape, signalling the danger of blindly classificatory Western approaches to the natural world.

Hughes has long courted acclaim for her vivid, faithfully realist paintings of other artists' work, both that of her peers and ancient artisans. The relationship between viewership and [spatial/temporal] slippage has always been a subject of interest to Hughes, and so a shift from painting the works of her peers to making pictures of early artefacts was a natural progression. In 1798, the Romantic Friedrich Schlegel observed that "Many

works of the ancients have become fragments. Many works of the moderns are fragments at the time of their origin.” Translating work in this way contorts received ideas of representation and authenticity alike; while these works demonstrate a marked shift in the artists’ practice, a determined investigation of these values is still at the heart of this series.

For the nineteenth century realists, truthful mimesis—of unassailable *reality*—became the central rallying point against the perceived artificiality and exaggeration of academic and Romantic painting. Yet despite this tension, Hughes’ experience working between both modes results in remarkably self-assured images. The works in *The world is dark and full of wonder* question strict ideas of nature’s constitution and replication. Collapsing space in the painted landscape and time through the visual quotation of Renaissance gestures, distinctions between ‘real’ and ‘fake’, ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ are no longer of any use to the viewer. Hughes’ faultless modulation of painting’s formal qualities simply leaves an unsettling, taciturn beauty.

Hugh Magnus, August 2026

NICHOLAS
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GALLERY



KEZ HUGHES

Ascension

2026

oil on poly cotton

163 x 122.5 cm

\$14,000

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Monument

2026

oil on poly cotton

163 x 122.5 cm

\$14,000

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Epilogue

2026

oil on poly cotton

122 x 101.5 cm

\$9,000

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Tradition

2026

oil on poly cotton

122 x 101.5 cm

\$9,000

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Theatre

2026

oil on poly cotton

51 x 76 cm

\$4,900

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KEZ HUGHES

Magnificent

2026

oil on linen

50.5 x 61 cm

\$4,400

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Cameo

2026

oil on board

50.5 x 40.5 cm

\$3,300

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KEZ HUGHES

Chronicle

2026

oil on board

50.5 x 40.5 cm

\$3,300

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Debut

2026

oil on linen

35.5 x 35.5 cm

\$2,900



KEZ HUGHES

Siren

2026

oil on board

35.5 x 28 cm

\$2,500

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KEZ HUGHES

Spectre

2026

oil on board

35.5 x 28 cm

\$2,500

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KEZ HUGHES

Symposium

2026

oil on board

35.5 x 28 cm

\$2,500

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KEZ HUGHES

Tableau

2026

oil on board

35.5 x 28 cm

\$2,500

NICHOLAS
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KEZ HUGHES

Vignette

2026

oil on board

25.5 x 20.5 cm

\$1,900



Melbourne based painter Kez Hughes has a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) from the Victorian College of the Arts, and has held solo exhibitions since 2006 in Melbourne. She has been exhibited in group exhibitions since 2004 in Melbourne, Brisbane, Ballarat and Gippsland and internationally in Sri Lanka at art spaces including Margaret Lawrence Gallery at the Victorian College of the Arts, the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Ballarat Art Gallery, Bendigo Art Gallery, Federation University, RMIT School of Art, West Space, TCB and BUS Projects.

Kez Hughes is a recipient of the 2006 Roger Kemp Memorial Award at the Victorian College of the Arts and the 2016 APEX Art Fellowship, New York. She has been a finalist in the 2023 Sir John Sulman Prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the 2019 and 2017 Arthur Guy Memorial Prize at Bendigo Art Gallery, the 2024 and 2019 Bayside Art Prize at Bayside Art Gallery, the 2017 Darebin Art Prize and the 2009 Williamstown Art Prize. Her work is held in the collections of Artbank, the Circle Collective, Melbourne and private collections throughout Australia.

KEZ HUGHES

EDUCATION

- 2005 Bachelor of Fine Art, Honours, Victorian College of the Arts
2004 Bachelor of Fine Art, Painting, Victorian College of the Arts

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2026 *The World is Dark and Full of Wonder*, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne
2025 *Timelapse*, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne
2024 *Translations*, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne
2023 *You Never Got Me Right*, Stockroom Kyneton, Victoria
2019 *Portraits*, LON Gallery, Collingwood
2017 *Spaghetti Western*, C3 Abbotsford Convent
2013 *The Full Picture*, Chapter House Lane, Melbourne
2012 *Best Of*, Westspace Melbourne
2010 *The Critic Smiles with David Coles*, Rearview, Melbourne
2009 *Love the way you make art*, BUS Projects Melbourne
Don't Let Go, Third Drawer Down, Melbourne
2008 *World Tokenism*, TCB Inc. Melbourne
2007 *Cover Versions*, Westspace, Melbourne
2006 *Paintings of Exhibitions I went to*, TCB Inc. Melbourne

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2026 *Winter 2026*, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne
The Election Exhibition, Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne
Autumn 2026, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne
CAVES Fundraiser 2026, CAVES, Melbourne
2025 *Summer 2025*, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne
CAVES Fundraiser 2025, CAVES, Melbourne
Spring1883 IX with Nicholas Thompson Gallery at Hotel Windsor, Melbourne
A Summer Selection, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne
Quarantine Art Fair with Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Portsea

- 2024 *Review 2024*, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne
CAVES Fundraiser 2024, CAVES, Melbourne
Bayside Art Prize, Bayside Gallery, Brighton
- 2023 *Renditions*, Project 8 Gallery, Melbourne.
Sir John Sulman Prize, Art Gallery of New South Wales
- 2021 *CAVES Fundraiser 2021*, CAVES, Melbourne
Conners Conners Fundraiser, Conners Conners, Melbourne
- 2020 *CAVES Fundraiser 2020*, CAVES, Melbourne
- 2019 *Collision Drive 3*, Curated by Dr Steven Rendall, Project Space, RMIT School of Art, Carlton
Arthur Guy Memorial Prize, Bendigo Art Gallery
Fidelities, with David Jolly and Sienna van Rossum, Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne.
CAVES Fundraiser 2019, CAVES, Melbourne
Snake Charmer, with Matthew Dettmer and Annika Koops, LON Gallery, Collingwood.
- 2018 *Still Life Part 1*, Curated by Adam Stone. Irene Rose Gallery Brunswick
Busprojects Fundraiser, Busprojects, Melbourne
Mirrors II, with John R Neeson, Glasshouse Lane, Collingwood
- 2017 *Arthur Guy Memorial Prize*, Bendigo Art Gallery
CAVES Fundraiser 2017, CAVES, Melbourne
Darebin Art Prize, Bundoora Homestead Art Centre, Melbourne
- 2016 *Double Agent*, Schoolhouse Studios, Melbourne.
CAVES Fundraiser 2016, CAVES, Melbourne
Mirrors I, with John R Neeson, BUS Projects, Melbourne.
Caves Offsite, Switchback Gallery, Federation University, Churchill, Gippsland.
On Hubris, Irony and Schadenfreude, LON Gallery, Collingwood
- 2013 *The Knock Off Show*, SLOPES, Fitzroy.
- 2012 *Objectives*, Curated by John R Neeson, Techno Park Studios, Williamstown
- 2011 *Metro Art Award*, Metro Art Gallery, Malvern.
- 2010 *Network*, Ballarat Art Gallery, Victoria.

Club house, DAMP, 6th Asia Pacific Triennial, Queensland Art Gallery.

- 2009 *Williamstown Art Prize, The Substation, Newport.*
- 2008 *Techno Park, Opening Exhibition, Williamstown.*
- 2006 *Curry Side of the Moon, Barefoot Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka.*
- 2004 *The Wallara Travelling Scholarship, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, VCA, Melbourne.*

CURATED EXHIBITIONS

- 2026 *The Painter's Eye: Curated by Kez Hughes, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne*

AWARDS & PRIZES

- 2024 *Bayside Art Prize, Bayside Gallery, Brighton (finalist)*
- 2023 *Sir John Sulman Prize, Art Gallery of New South Wales (finalist)*
- 2019 *Arthur Guy Memorial Prize, Bendigo Art Gallery (finalist)*
- 2017 *Darebin Art Prize, Bundoora Homestead Art Centre, Melbourne (finalist)*
Arthur Guy Memorial Prize, Bendigo Art Gallery (finalist)
- 2016 *APEX ART Fellowship, New York.*
- 2011 *Metro Art Award, Metro Art Gallery, Malvern (finalist)*
- 2009 *Williamstown Art Prize, The Substation, Newport (finalist)*
- 2006 *Roger Kemp Memorial Award, Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne*
- 2004 *The Wallara Travelling Scholarship, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne. (finalist)*

COLLECTIONS

Artbank

The Circle Collective, Melbourne

Private collections, Australia

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2025 Tiarney Miekus 'Weekend Picks' The Saturday Age, 26 July

- Hugh Magnus 'Campbell Pretty; Kit Johnston & afra küllü' MEMO Review (online)
- 2024 Josephine Mead 'Kez Hughes: Studio' *Art Guide*, May/June 2024, 76 to 81
- Petra White 'That Galloping Horse' Shearsman Books (cover image)
- 2023 Anne Marie Kiely 'A vibrant modernist Melbourne apartment with creativity at its core' *Vogue Australia* (online)









