



JASPER KNIGHT
THE CORAL COAST

Curated by 3:33 Art Projects
Artist Profile booth, Sydney Contemporary 2023

ARTIST PROFILE

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REVIEW IMOGEN CHARGE

For twenty years Jasper Knight has been known for his bold, hard-edged abstractions of industrial landscapes. Now, he is pushing his boundaries as an artist, painting soft romantic botanical works on linen. His new series, *The Coral Coast*, featuring twelve palm trees, will be curated by 3:33 Art Projects at Sydney Contemporary 2023.

“Surface. It doesn’t matter what you paint, your works are about surface.” In his Darlinghurst studio, surrounded by two decades of his work, Knight reflects on this observation, made by Ian Grant, his tutor at the University of New South Wales during Knight’s 2003 master’s degree. Surface, for Knight, was initially the cold, glossy, collaged landscapes of industrial buildings, cars and boats. Discarded signs, plywood, aluminium and drips of enamel were constructed to blur the lines between sculpture and painting, creating an active, dynamic surface.

Along with these industrial landscapes, Knight is renowned for his portraiture. The eight-time Archibald Prize finalist draws inspiration from pop art and graffiti, employing hard, bold backgrounds in striking contrast to the softly portrayed demeanour of his sitters. These surfaces are more personal, a dedication to human connection.

In 2021, Knight completed a series of paintings inspired by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, prompting Knight’s father to question if he recalled the Toulouse-Lautrec posters Jasper had had while growing up, “I had a moment of thought. My entire painting process had been informed by Toulouse-Lautrec: these primary colours and black outlines and I hadn’t even realised. It made a lot of sense – that was a great release — and a full stop.”

Driven by the desire to break free from his comfort zone, Knight took a break from painting and started photographing trees. While palm trees are not emblematic of Sydney, they are plentiful; from the native Cabbage-Tree Palms that adorn the east coast to the introduced Canary Island Date Palm that grows in abundance in Sydney’s parks. Their amplexness became apparent to Knight: “the more you look the more you see.” In 2022 he made the shift to painting palms. The depth and dimension of the palm trees give the impression they are full of life, laden with bumps and bruises, a palpable surface. Knight declares that his palm trees are “more alive than my other works.” The materials and content may have changed, but his work remains about surface.

Irrespective of the change in subject, Knight continues to work within his primary-coloured roots. Reds, yellows, and blues are constant throughout his practice, with very few other colours making an appearance. His first set of palm trees, of which Knight made only twenty-five – all blue – were shown

in solo shows in Sydney and Melbourne and at Sydney Contemporary in 2022.

Initially loose depictions of photographs, he explains the palm trees have evolved into fabrications from his imagination: everywhere – yet nowhere. Spontaneous, gutsy brushstrokes produce trees that appear to be similar, but are in no way consistent. The artist fondly refers to them as his “fireworks,” pushing the paintings into abstraction. Knight reasons that this “means the fronds of the palm can do whatever, they don’t have to be realistic or identifiable.” The artist is pleased to have removed the possibility for his audiences to analyse the trees.

Upon the release of the blue palm trees, people enquired if he could paint his palms in a variety of different colours, or if he could paint other trees: they wanted more. Encouraged, Knight experimented with green, red, and yellow – he asserts that there is no greater meaning than the colour palette. He opted for yellow palm trees; the vibrant hues are a reminder of sunburnt palms in Fiji. Curated by 3:33 Art Projects, this series of works, *The Coral Coast*, will form Knight’s next exhibition, as the feature artist in the Artist Profile booth at a 2023 Sydney Contemporary. These yellow, blistered palms see *The Coral Coast* series developing dramatic hues of oranges, mustards, and pinks. Boasting its own spectrum of light from within, the palm trees dance across the canvases, playful, inviting: the surface alive.

The palm trees loom tall, stretching into the sky, reminiscent of Knight’s industrial landscapes. Richard Cooke, in his 2022 *FIREWORKS* essay, wrote that palm trees tend to disappear from our field of vision in the city, “plant blindness,” how “city walkers can often experience them as forgettable, indistinct presences, a telegraph pole with a green tuft on top.” The palm trees may be a figment of Knight’s imagination, but the viewer is reminded, in a somewhat distant, eerily similar memory, of walking below palms, insignificant compared to the lanky giants that surround them. Perhaps next time, you too will be inspired to look up.

After leaving Knight’s studio, I found myself wandering the parks of Sydney, mesmerised by the palm trees that had slipped from my vision. Visit Sydney Contemporary this year to see *The Coral Coast* and plunge yourself into a world unknown. Jasper Knight will make you appreciate the previously unseen.



Jasper Knight

Island Bubble, 2023

gloss acrylic and gesso on linen
183 x 152 cm

\$20,000 AUD incl. GST

The Coral Coast series

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Jasper Knight

The Coral Coast, 2023

gloss acrylic and gesso on linen
183 x 152 cm

\$20,000 AUD incl. GST

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Jasper Knight

Heart Beat, 2023

gloss acrylic and gesso on linen
183 x 122 cm

\$19,000 AUD incl. GST

The Coral Coast series

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Jasper Knight

Diamond nights and ruby lights, 2023

gloss acrylic and gesso on linen
152 x 137 cm

\$16,000 AUD incl. GST

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Jasper Knight

White Castle, 2023

gloss acrylic and gesso on linen
152 x 137 cm

\$16,000 AUD incl. GST

The Coral Coast series

Curated by 3:33 Art Projects,
Artist Profile booth



Jasper Knight

Paper Planes, 2023

gloss acrylic and gesso on linen
152 x 137 cm

\$16,000 AUD incl. GST

The Coral Coast series

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Jasper Knight

Butterfingers, 2023

gloss acrylic and gesso on linen
91 x 61 cm

\$6,000 AUD incl. GST

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Jasper Knight

Stalactites, 2023

enamel on aluminium
80 x 60 cm

\$5,500 AUD incl. GST

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Jasper Knight

Viti Levu, 2023

enamel on aluminium
80 x 60 cm

\$5,500 AUD incl. GST

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Jasper Knight

Korolevu, 2023

enamel on aluminium
80 x 60 cm

\$5,500 AUD incl. GST

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Jasper Knight

Step Brothers, 2023

enamel on aluminium
80 x 60 cm

\$5,500 AUD incl. GST

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Jasper Knight

Mother, I missed the plane again, 2023

enamel on aluminium
80 x 60 cm

\$5,500 AUD incl. GST

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