



Between Heaven and Earth II  
**Tony Lane**

**Followers of Tony Lane's painting in recent years have become accustomed in his work to a scintillating plethora of images and symbols intermixed in a huge variety of colours, sizes, textures, frames and formats. Among their rich inventory drawn largely from the phenomenal worlds of nature and culture any particular work might include (some of) candles, moons, tables, hearts, bottles, trees, swans, armchairs, clouds, hands, books, beads, table chairs, heads, necklaces, tears, pearls, legs, cloths, antlers, chalices, mazes, hills, rocks, diamonds, tablecloths, vessels, and so on, together with a variety of abstract shapes and patterns.**

However, in a large and expanding series painted in the last year or two entitled *Between Heaven and Earth* – of which this exhibition is the second part (part one was shown at orexart in 2019), and which is evidently still on-going – Lane has greatly simplified his visual lexicon, stripping away much of the welter of phenomena which previously characterized his work, in order to focus on a smaller range of images – all familiar from earlier paintings – which are repeated (with continuous variation, but without close replication) from work to work.

The basic elements involved are those suggested by the series

title: *Between Heaven and Earth*. 'Earth' is manifested primarily by ranges of hills usually viewed from a distance across flat plains; often these ranges are multiple, in defiance of geography and perspective, but strongly reminiscent of coastal profiles drawn in the log-books of navigators such as James Cook, as in *Between Heaven and Earth, Tarawera* and *Day and Night and Day*. 'Heaven' comes in the form of skies seen at various times of day, night and season, as in *Red Plain, Kaingaroa, Vision of Snow*, and *Sky Both Night and Day*, some with distinctive halo-like lenticular clouds, as in *Halo, Galatea*, and *Towards The Promised Land*. Joining earth and heaven are (in most but not all of the pictures) strings or streamers of dotted or serrated lines, somewhat reminiscent of Colin McCahon's celebrated *Jump* series of 1974, and which perform a somewhat similar physical and metaphysical function, but in Lane's case the strings are invariably vertical (more or less) and usually multiple (sometimes as few as four, sometimes more than 20), and constitute an abstract or conceptual element in what otherwise are 'real' landscapes, some even having place names as in *Between Heaven and Earth, Tarawera*, or *Whanarua*, or *Halo, Galatea* – all places in the mountain-rimmed plateaus of the central North Island known to the artist since childhood.



*Between Heaven and Earth, Tarawera (2019/20) oil on gesso panel, 920 x 1845mm \$28,000*

Other titles point towards more symbolic or idealized contexts: *Looking Towards The Promised Land, Rising Up, Silhouette (Three of Diamonds)*. A handful of works fall outside the pervasive landscape



conventions, notably *Portrait in a Landscape* and *Portrait of a Dark Night With Moons* which both employ familiar Lane symbols of trees and armchairs (or should that be trees *in* armchairs). The trees are skeletal and denuded of vegetation which may be a glancing allusion to the ‘dead tree’ imagery of an earlier generation of New Zealand paintings updated for the fraught era of climate change, but also evoking the imagery of Siennese painting by Sassetta and others of the fourteenth and

fifteenth century, in which stark mountain landscapes are the arena for spiritual events.

Although relatively simple and straightforward in their iconography, the series is rich in the art historical lineage it evokes. Reference has already been made to early Italian Renaissance landscape painting, to the works of Colin McCahon with both natural and supernatural connotations, and to the exacting art of coastal profiling from Cook to Charles Heaphy. But Lane has also made reference to another tradition of painting which bears on his practice, that of the Maori artists who adapted European conventions of representation in their decoration of marae and churches serving Te Kooti’s Ringatu religion. Lane wrote: ‘They seem to me to be some of the best paintings to be made in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the nineteenth century ... I’m trying to make paintings on similar lines, connecting what can be seen, our own context, to a larger idea of the immutability and beauty of the natural world, the need to connect with this world and bring it into a new sort of consciousness before it’s too late’.

*Between Heaven and Earth* offers paintings which, while unique to their maker, allude richly to the complex heritages to which a New Zealand painter is subject by living and working fully immersed in the here and now.

– Peter Simpson, March 2020



*Day and Night and Day* (2019/20) oil on gesso panel, 875 x 1815mm \$28,000



*Whanarua* (2019/20) oil on gesso panel, 640 x 1188mm \$22,000



*Portrait in a Landscape* (2019) oil on gesso panel, 1425 x 1245mm \$26,000



*Portrait in a Dark Night with Moons* (2019) oil on gesso panel, 1245 x 635mm \$22,000





*Near and Far* (2019/20) oil on gesso panel, 230 x 335mm \$24,000



*Halo, Galatea* (2019) oil on gesso panel, 935 x 1020mm \$15,500



*Looking Towards the Promised Land* (2020) oil on gesso panel, 640 x 650mm \$9,500



*Rising Up* (2019/20) oil on gesso panel, 650 x 638mm \$9,500



*Red Plain, Kaingaroa* (2020) oil on gesso panel, 335 x 355mm \$5,500



*Sky, Both Night and Day* (2019/20) oil on gesso panel, 230 x 335mm \$4,500



*Silhouette (Three of Diamonds)* (2020) oil, gold leaf gesso panel, 195 x 2130mm \$16,500

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