



IAN SMITH
FLESH AND BONE

19 SEPTEMBER - 7 NOVEMBER 2020

NOOSA REGIONAL GALLERY

IAN SMITH
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Right: *Grandmother and Child*, 1999, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 152cm



IAN SMITH: THE FLESH OF THE WORLD

Ian Smith is all about painting. It's occupied him for most of his life. Sometimes it forms the very subject matter of his work. Others, he takes everyday scenes and repositions them as an allegory for the struggles inherent to the medium itself. Even his written contribution to this catalogue starts by breaking painting down to its most basic of parts.

This is not to say that painting is all that Smith's work is about. He describes himself as a figurative painter, although a painter of 'the compelling in the everyday' and 'the hidden in plain sight' is how I like to think of his work. In 2011 a touring exhibition of Smith's works, titled *On and Off the Road*, passed through Noosa Regional Gallery on its journey around Queensland. Audiences were given canvases layered with pigment depicting the scaffolded structure on the reverse side of various roadside signs; negative spaces cut into the landscape by empty billboards; flatbed trucks laden with all kinds of materials and arrangements; and a series of figures relegated to their seats in the cabins of passenger planes. While the exhibition, on the surface, was framed around experiences of road trips and travel, to take perhaps a more abstract and conceptual look, it might be argued that the body of work was as much about the spaces between things and the structures around things – the gritty bits of the world that are there to prop up the things that are meant to capture our attention.

Flesh and Bone again sees these kind of ideas break through Smith's painterly surfaces. The subject matter is diverse – landscapes, construction vehicles, family portraits, bridges – but the works share both an energised and expressive rendering of the appearance of things while casually revealing the scaffolds and structures – real and imagined – that these outer skins of reality might hang off. There's an easy push and pull between the pulpy surfaces carved out and the skeletons underneath – be

they the exposed trusses of residential houses; the repetitive elegant contours traced off the edge of a perfect French curve to give a body its form; or the almost geodesic armature underlying the irregular curves of imposing mountainscapes that dwarf the human projects at their feet. Sometimes the structures pull forwards of their husk, in the same way that Smith's foregrounds and backgrounds jostle for prominence. We get use to the idea that the things we can look at and easily label are what our reality is composed of, but Smith's paintings remind us that it's also the fleshy stuff in between that gives substance to our worlds.

The idea that a distinction can be made between the mind and the body is one that has coursed through philosophical thinking for centuries and it is this idea that reinforces an attitude towards the world that positions us as separate or different to it. While the last hundred or so years has seen these ideas questioned, revisited and revised by many prominent thinkers, the legacy of this dualism continues to make most of us think of the world in terms of a series of objects that sit against a background for us to take in at arm's length and interact with as we decide. But the reality – more likely – is that we are all carved out of the same stuff as the mountains and the trees and our buildings and each other. We are all part of the one flesh of the world and the frames beneath our skin that make us seem important and distinct are echoed all around us. With only a little imagination, these are quite readily drawn to the surface to diffuse any sense that we are anything more than just part of the same flesh and bone.

Michael Brennan
Gallery Director
Noosa Regional Gallery



Red Painter - Green Painter,
2008, oil on canvas, 140 x 240cm

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At its most elemental, painting is about suspending blobs, smears and blocks of paint on a fabric membrane, solid sheet or wall. When I was about 10 years old, I watched an Italian plasterer [one of those immigrants who had brought Mediterranean building styles to Australia] work on the exterior walls of a house being built next door. He suspended a slushy mix on stud-frame walls covered with silver tar paper and chicken wire mesh. As the chicken wire slowly disappeared under concrete, amorphous shape patterns came and went. Later he threw and splattered a fanciful pattern of darker grey plaster over the surface. Whether 1950s stucco houses are now cool or kitsch, I realised I had watched the making of something like a monumental painting. He had hung the surface 'flesh' on the structural 'bone' of the work. Little wonder that by age 25 I'd chosen a house painter confronting a wall as a definitive image; and continue to use it in my work.

I am primarily a figurative painter, even if in Australia conceding to landscape is inevitable. While painting mountains, I preferred 'flesh and bone' density to the airy sketchiness employed by many Australian landscape painters. 'Deconstructing' the mountains to expose imaginary inner armatures, paradoxically delivered me more solid mountainscapes than if I painted them as 'views'. But not all structures in painting are grids, armatures, stud-frames, girders and scaffolding. In my 'Portrait of Ray Hughes', the under-structure is photography which, although virtual, is presumed in contemporary life to be the next best 'reality' after flesh, bone, earth, wind, fire and water themselves. It offers a 'social structure' or 'reality' on which my painting of Ray floats. Similarly, the portrait of myself as a baby is posed in the socio-historic 'structure' of a family photo, boxed in a gilt frame [even if only a plaster-moulded fake one]. Meanwhile, a free-curling structure of my own invention [using a

set of French Curve drawing templates] provides an appropriate under-structure for the over-sized, rotund baby portrait of my daughter with my mother. Apart from drawing babies, I have employed French Curves extensively to structure paintings and drawings of flowers [particularly Hibiscuis] and my curvilinear Italian Greyhound dog.

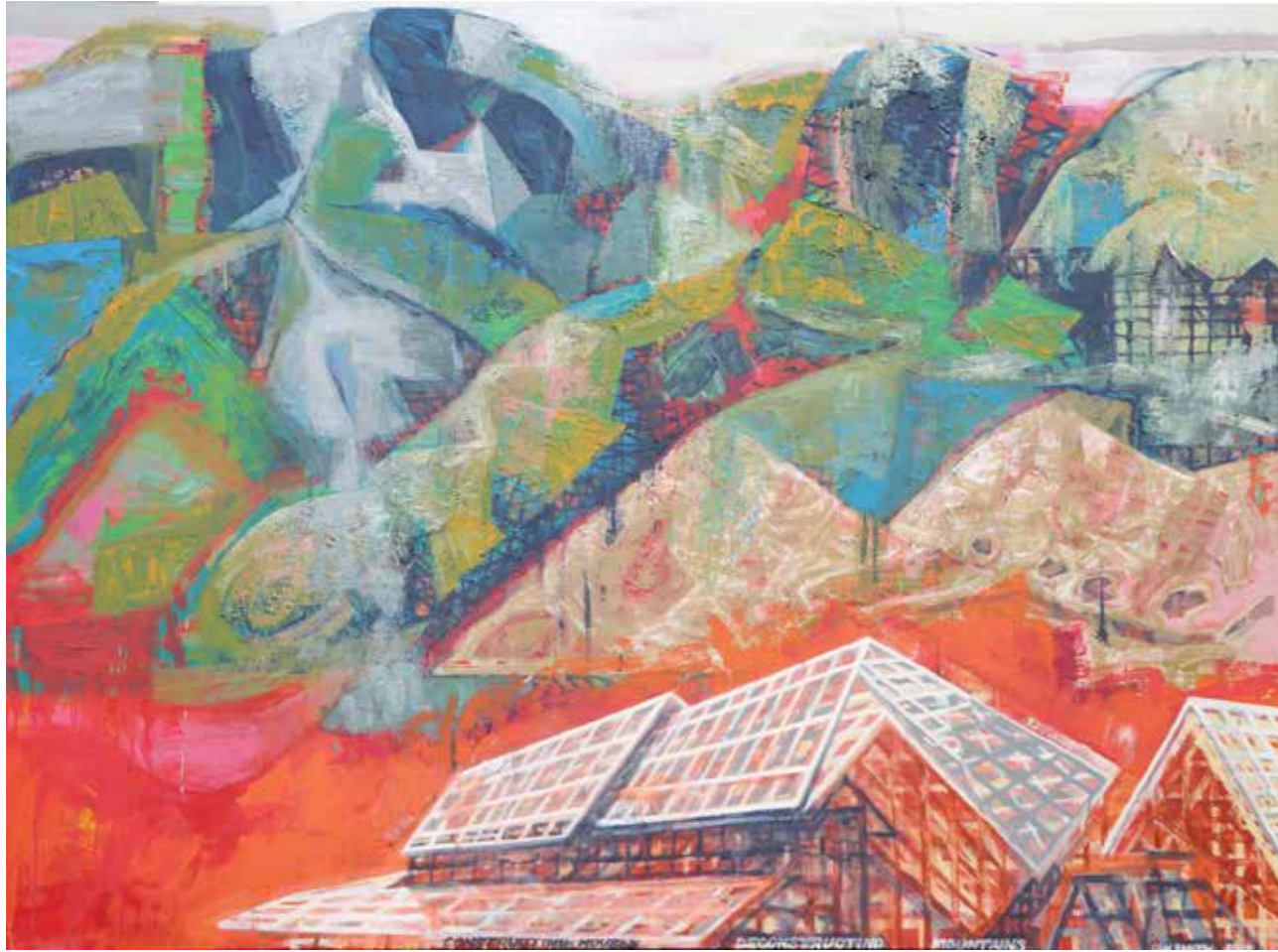
Ian Smith
Brisbane, August 2020



Abandoned mountain excursion, 2016, acrylic on canvas , 164 x 244cm



Various spectrum figures, 2016, acrylic on canvas on board, 60 x 40cm



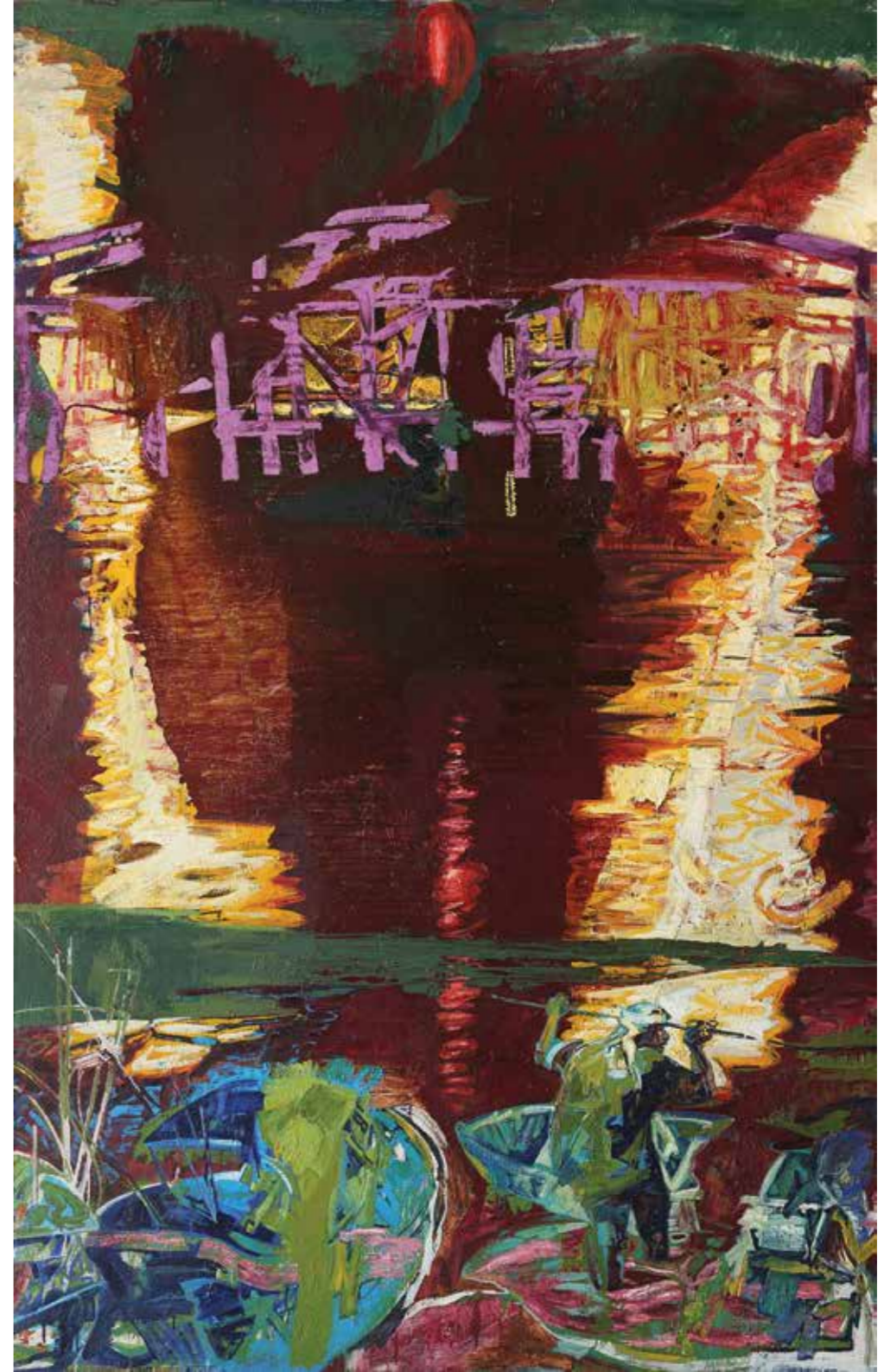
Constructing houses - Deconstructing mountains (1), 2017, acrylic on canvas, 107 x 144cm

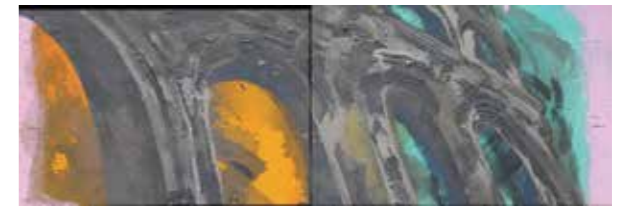


Constructing houses - Deconstructing mountains (2), 2017, acrylic on canvas, 86 x 122cm



Above: *Man in a hole [8]* 2020, acrylic on canvas, 160 x 126cm
Right: *Lights beyond a bridge*, 1997, oil on canvas, 280 x 176cm





Various small bridges, 2019 - 2020, acrylic on canvas on board



Humidity, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 170 x 240cm



Tropical Theatre 2017 - 2020, acrylic on canvas, 144 x 180cm

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Back cover: *(Nose to toe) selfportrait in swimwear*, 2008, oil on canvas, 85 x 70cm

Front cover: *Steps between islands & mainlands*, 1986, oil on canvas, 240 x 314cm



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