

Owen Lade 1922-2007



Retrospective

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DR. EILLIE RAY

Owen Lade's work and life has been a popular subject for many curators in Tasmania. From museum and gallery collections to portrait and survey exhibitions, Lade's paintings and drawings have held a strange fascination for those who encounter his work. Under the Devonport Regional Gallery Guest Curator program, Jane Deeth was invited to curate a retrospective exhibition on the work of this fascinating artist. After Lade's death in 2007, the Devonport Regional Gallery was gifted sketchbooks, journals and several paintings at the bequest of the artist. Many of these works are represented in this retrospective along with existing pieces from the Collection and works on loan from the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery and private collectors.

Lade's work was first shown at The Little Gallery, Devonport, in 1968 alongside an exhibition by ceramicist Harold Ramsden. Jean Thomas, who founded the Gallery in 1968, introduced the work of many now prominent Tasmanian artists to a local and national audience, including Owen Lade's strange and beguiling paintings and drawings.

In an Examiner newspaper review of Lade's exhibition in 1968, Alan McIntyre wrote:

Owen Lade has an authentic and personal style, so innocent of any technical influence that one is tempted to label him a 'primitive'. His completely honest approach to, and obvious love of, each detail of his subject matter also suggests this category. At first glance, too, these pictures appear simple, and some, perhaps, even a little awkward. We do not find here the seductive washes one is accustomed to find in watercolour. However, on a second look one realises that these are paintings of great subtlety and complexity, both as to colour and design, both of which are built into an intricate mosaic of dabs and splashes. His exquisite paintings of toadstools are a reminder that Mr Lade holds a Bachelor of Science degree.

Lade spent much of the latter part of his career painting portraits of children, for which he is best known. Within these portraits the viewer may witness the 'intricate mosaic of dabs and splashes' combined with 'great subtlety and complexity' and 'awkwardness' that Alan McIntyre refers to. Yet the full-frontal poses and piercing gazes of the sitters brings to mind the balancing act between childhood and adulthood; between naivety and understanding.

The Devonport Regional Gallery is proud to own the largest collection of the artist's work and is pleased to be presenting this retrospective in the region where Lade spent most of his working life as an artist. Gratitude is extended to the curator, Dr Jane Deeth, for her diligent research and enthusiasm for the project, and to Daniel Thomas for his attention to detail in writing the catalogue essay and compiling the artist's biography.

Dr Ellie Ray
Director

DANIEL THOMAS

Brain-damaged after a difficult birth, Owen Lade's mild cerebral palsy left him eccentric, but still very intelligent and extremely persevering. He was a gangling six-foot-three inches tall (190 cm), slow, growly and lisping in speech, and clumsy with his hands. The adult art student was sometimes pelted by children while riding his bicycle to factory jobs in Devonport. His much younger sister says he nevertheless liked children, and from his 'elephantine memory' she also recalls he patiently taught her innumerable details about the workings of plants and insects. Starting in 1970 with Poor Fatherless Little Kevin, and continuing until his eyesight finally failed in 1989, Lade produced a series of 170 portraits of children. They are Australia's most interesting child portraits.

'Lovely, unnerving paintings' is how one owner, the sculptor Bob Jenyns, describes the portraits. Some of the sitters remember deeply loathing the five-day portrait campaigns that Lade negotiated with their parents; with several stating that they found him 'creepy'. The fewer commissioned portraits were not so tense; grandparents or parents were familiar with the artist and better able to soften the interaction between artist and child model. One sitter, then aged ten, only remembers worrying where the green and orange colours in his face came from.

Lade began his working life as a scientist, but art as a hobby was always on his mind. After graduating and working as a laboratory assistant for ten years in Melbourne Lade said, 'after transfer to Launceston and a few mishaps I was soon sacked. Too many broken test tubes.'

In 1962, aged 40, Lade at last committed himself fully to art. He shuffled between home, at Latrobe, and Launceston Technical College. Lacking manual dexterity, he did not shine at drawing. Alan McIntyre, a teacher at the College, made the liberating suggestion: 'Why not try pointillism.' Dabs of distinct dotted colours avoided the unsteady linearity of Lade's earlier work and made a virtue of his excessively elaborate detail; the use of pure colours avoided his previous blended-pigment muddiness. Before the Latrobe and Devonport child portraits there were a few Launceston life-class nudes—during the hobby-painting 1950s in Melbourne he had already felt the need to tackle that traditional art-school necessity, along with the other two basics: the portrait and the landscape. But throughout the 1960s Lade was chiefly a watercolour painter, of landscapes and plants.

An expert mycologist, Lade filled watercolour sheets of mushrooms and toadstools with several aspects of each specimen, annotated with details of its habitat (Wet fern forest) and its flavour after cooking (Rather like chicken). The images are unusually lively. Instead of resting flat on the page for scrutiny the images curl, swell, shrink and wriggle. He knew that fungi are plants with attributes close to animals. These creatures torn from the earth undergo trauma and paroxysm.

Watercolour portraits of Victorian and Edwardian buildings were surrounded by flowerbeds and vegetation, which fulfilled the artist's need for elaborated detail. These objects required, he said, further beautification: 'Nature creates the most beautiful colours, but man-made objects such as houses often have drab hues which must be analysed into the colours of the rainbow.'

His pointillist landscapes in oil are less conventional, most of them painted after bushwalking in the Tasmanian wilderness. Lake Pedder subjects followed a light-aircraft dash to see its legendary beauty just before its flooding for hydroelectricity. Lost buildings or submerged lakes and waterfalls were sometimes inscribed on the back with the biblical word *Ichabod*, signifying 'the glory is departed'. In the portraits of children we recognise a similarly preservationist regret for childhood's lost glory.

Lade captures the vividness of moments in time. His autobiographical notes compiled in 1976 are filled, relentlessly to the end, with precisely dated detail. He was a taxonomist of fungi, and there is also a taxonomical air about the child portraits. Lade found security in tested, methodical procedures. On the back of each masonite panel he inscribed not only his sitter's first name but also a sequential CP (Child Portrait) number, a quasi-scientific systematic record that also resembles the opus numbers assigned to classical music compositions. On the front the dates specify day and month of completion.

Each portrait took five systematic work days: first he completed a charcoal sketch and fixative on the primed board; on the second day flesh and hair; third day clothing; fourth day the background; and the last day was for 'corrections ... and putting in the eye lashes', the signature and the date. Each child received a model's fee, of \$5 in earlier years, \$10 later. If the parent chose to buy the result—most did not—the standard price was \$100. Each portrait was painted on the same standard-sized panel, three feet by two feet (91.5 × 61cm). When twins or near-age children shared a double portrait the panel was doubled exactly to accommodate them, three feet by four feet.

Each child was posed similarly, seated in a chair facing the artist, and the viewer. Small children are seen full length, their feet visible at the bottom. Larger children, approaching the apparent cut-off age of around twelve, have grown too big for the standard-sized panel and are cropped below their knees. Each was painted in the sitter's own habitat and own clothing, the small ones often with summertime bare feet. The 170 variations in 1970-80s country-town middle class clothing and furniture now constitute a fascinating community tapestry—a child astronaut's space suit, monster-print T-shirts, bentwood chairs, a modern cone chair, an office swivel chair, sunroom cane chairs, grandparents' nondescript chairs with antimacassars, a big modern plant pot for a philodendron. While many of the subjects of these paintings are still alive, some of the children are now dead.

One of the few modern masters' names found in Lade's autobiographical notes is Bonnard. We can confidently assume Bonnard's interiors are a source for Lade's easy rectangulated play with background windows, blinds, doors, bookshelves and chair backs to contain horror vacui pointillist infill, and for the gorgeous colours that transform these rooms. Swirls of hands and clothing animate the centres of the compositions; occasionally a too 'wrigglesome' sitter has been stabilised by dumping an emphatically lifeless doll on his or her lap.

Lade's process concluded with eyelashes, the final correction to each child portrait. This surely tells us that the gaze or glare from the tense or bored individual is the prime meaning. He surely admires, above all, childhood's extreme directness, the pure transparency of feeling, as yet unspoilt by polite dissimulation. The paintings are about frankness, and truth, and vitality—qualities that will inevitably depart as the sitter grows older.

At home in Devonport in late summer, March 1988, O.G. ('Oggy') Lade undressed and stared at his own sagging 65-year-old body in a tall mirror in order to paint, with startling though decorous frankness, a complex self-image. The occasion for his only ambitious high-art nude allegory was his own imminent departure for a nursing home, imminent loss of sight from glaucoma, and forced retirement from art practice.

The six-foot-tall man is seated to fit a four-foot-high panel, and faces us naked. He is accompanied by a back view of his head and a shoulder, at work painting, framed in a benchtop mirror. The life model and the painter at work are the same person, both presented simultaneously in the same composition. He signed and titled the work *Yours Sincerely, O.G. Lade, 27.3.1988*. The conspicuously inscribed signature-cum-title is the normal sign-off for a formal but friendly written message; the painting is Lade's formal sign-off from art making.



Poor Fatherless Little Kevin, 1970

Oil on hardboard

91.0 x 61.5 cm

Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery

Shortly before his death nearly twenty years later, Lade concluded a cv for the nursing home with a single-sentence paragraph: 'Art has been the highlight of my life.' His presence, through his works of art, continues to be a strange and wonderfully luminous highlight in the life of the Devonport region.

This is a shortened version of an obituary article published in Art Monthly Australia, December 2007.

Daniel Thomas AM was once head of Australian art at the Art Gallery of NSW and the National Gallery of Australia and director of the Art Gallery of South Australia.

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Yours Sincerely, 1988
Oil on hardboard
121 x 90 cm
Collection of Luke Wagner

DR JANE DEETH

What does it take to become an artist? Such a question can be considered through looking at the practice of one particular artist, Owen Lade. This retrospective exhibition explores how Lade gathered the necessary skills from artists he encountered; articulated a personal language that connected him to the history of art; and recorded life experiences as a way of holding on to his memories.

The following list of works parallels the exhibition which is divided into sections that track the artist's practice and highlight particular categories of interest to him. Although Lade was fascinated by details pertaining to the people and places he painted—writing extensive notes on the reverse side of many works, particularly works on paper—curiously many of these works were not dated.

INFLUENCES

'My mother didn't really have any influence on me as she was not an artist herself.' —Owen Lade, reflecting on his life, 1997 ('Fortunately no bones were broken—an oral history project', Tape 8/9, Paul Franklin Willis. Place: room 40, Karingal Home for the Aged. October, 1977)

Between 1933 and the end of the 1960s, Lade took art classes with many of Tasmania's most significant artists. Their influences resonate in his

work, although he rejected Jack Carington Smith's use of black, preferring to mix tones from pure colours evident in the work of Dorothy Stoner, as he was encouraged to do by his teachers Geoff Tyson and Alan McIntyre at Launceston Technical College.

Dorothy Stoner, Portrait of Edith Holmes, 1955, oil on board, 87.0 x 71.8 cm. Collection of

The Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston. Purchased by the Launceston City Council, 1980

Jack Carington Smith, A shelf in the artist's studio, 1954, oil on canvas, 51.5 x 61.5 cm.

Collection of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston. Purchased by the Launceston City Council, 1983

Jack Carington Smith, Nude, 1962, oil on canvas, 61.3 x 92.1 cm. Collection of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston. Donated by Miss Hester Clarke under the Cultural Gifts Program, 1994

Geoff Tyson, View of the Sidmoth Kirk from the Batman Bridge, 1972, watercolour on paper, 52 x 68 cm. Collection of Jo McIntyre Bornemissza

Alan McIntyre, *The Grange Campbell Town*, 1973, watercolour on paper, 52 x 68.5 cm. Collection of Jo McIntyre Bornemissza

Alan McIntyre, *Rooftops at Roxeth Farm, Harrow-on-the-Hill*, 1982, watercolour on paper, 43 x 33 cm. Collection of Jo McIntyre Bornemissza

Alan McIntyre, *Untitled abstract*, 1966, oil on canvas, 61.5 x 76.5 cm. Collection of Jo McIntyre Bornemissza

Jo (Jocelyn) McIntyre, *Untitled portrait of Owen Lade*, 1969. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Bequeathed to the Devonport Regional Gallery by the Owen Gower Lade estate, 1988

THE TECH YEARS

'We did work hard, in an atmosphere of tolerance, harmony and gentle discipline tempered with kindness and respect.' —Jo McIntyre Bornemissza, in conversation with Jane Deeth, 2011

Lade attended Launceston Technical College in the 1960s, a time when becoming an artist involved learning the tools of the trade: life drawing; still life, including from classical plaster casts; watercolour landscapes en plein air; portraits; colour theory and abstraction.



Portrait of Edith Holmes, 1955
Dorothy Stoner
Oil on board - 87 x 71.8 cm
Collection of Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery

Cast Painting, date unknown, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 50.5cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Bequeathed to the Devonport Regional Gallery by the Owen Gower Lade estate, 2008

Untitled still life, date unknown, 50.7 x 76.6 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Bequeathed to the Devonport Regional Gallery by the Owen Gower Lade estate, 2008

Untitled male nude, 1966, oil on canvas, 90.5 x 60.5 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Purchased from the artist by the Devonport City Council, 1983

Untitled female nude, 1967–68, oil on canvas, 66.0 x 91.2 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Purchased from the artist by the Devonport City Council, 1991

Portrait of Jillian, date unknown, oil on board, 76.6 x 53 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Bequeathed to the Devonport Regional Gallery by the Owen Gower Lade estate, 1988

Abstract, 1966, Oil on board. 55 x 70 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Donated by Sue Smith



Untitled, 1966
Oil on canvas
90.5 x 60.5 cm
Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery



Female Nude, 1967 - 68

Oil on canvas

66 x 91.2 cm

Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery

NOTICING THE DETAILS

'The artist and the scientist in harmony.' —Patrick McMurray, Lade: An exhibition of works 1948-1982 catalogue essay, 1983

In 1968, Lade was commissioned by Mr Geoffrey Lempriere of Port Sorell to paint fungi. Whether Lade had an obsessive condition or was simply expressing his interest in scientific detail and classification, this series shows his fascination with the natural world and the nature of things.

Untitled fungi study, 1968, watercolour on paper, 35 x 24 cm. Collection of Simon Houghton

Untitled fungi study, 1968, watercolour on paper, 35 x 24 cm. Collection of Simon Houghton

Untitled fungi study, 1968, watercolour on paper, 35 x 24 cm. Collection of Simon Houghton

Untitled fungi study, 1968, watercolour on paper, 35 x 24 cm. Collection of Simon Houghton

Edible Fungi watercolour on paper, 34 x 23.5 cm, and Fungi (probably edible but doubtfully so) 1968, 34.2 x 24.2 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Purchased from the artist by the Devonport City Council, 1983



Fungi (probably edible but doubtfully so), 1968
Watercolour on paper
34 x 23.5 cm
Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery



Edible Fungi 1968

Watercolour on paper

34.2 x 24.2 cm

Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery

FINDING A VOICE

'Perhaps you might like to try and lighten up your palette and apply the paint in a pointillist manner?'—Alan McIntyre, c.1970 as recalled by Jo McIntyre Bornemissza in conversation with Jane Deeth, 2011

After art school, Owen continued to paint. The limitations of a somewhat unsteady hand were countered by his experimental use of small dabs of vibrant pigment that intensified the energy in the work and the colour he loved so much.

Internal Decay, c.1970, oil on canvas, 76.5 x 50.1 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Purchased from the artist by the Devonport City Council, 1983

Mount Farrell, 1972, oil on hardboard, 94.7 x 105.7 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Donated by Mrs HR Thomas, 1972

Hobart Bridge as in January 1944, c. 1976, oil on composition board, 60.7 x 91.2 cm. Collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Purchased 1981



Internal Decay, c.1970

Oil on canvas

76.5 x 50.1 cm

Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery



Untitled, date unknown

Oil on canvas

50.7 x 76.6 cm

Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery

RECORDING CHILDREN

'To me (the portraits) were just an exercise in discipline. I thought if I wanted to learn how to paint buildings and landscapes, I'd have to learn portraiture first.' ... 'No anguish over loss of great gift.' —Sunday Examiner, 1 August 2004, page 14

'The most interesting Australian painter of children'
—Daniel Thomas, 'Owen Gower Lade 1922–2007: big artist in a small city', Art Monthly, Issue 206, 2007

Between 1970 and 1988 Lade painted 170 portraits of children. Each portrait took five sessions to complete. It is rumoured that some parents bought the finished work because they liked it and others so they could destroy it.

Poor Fatherless Little Kevin, 1970, oil on hardboard, 91 x 61.5 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Purchased with assistance from The Little Gallery Society, 1975

Colin, 1974, oil on hardboard, 91.5 x 61.2 cm. Collection of Devonport Regional Gallery. Bequeathed to the Devonport Regional Gallery by Owen Gower Lade estate, 2008

Alison II, 1981, oil on hardboard, 90 x 60 cm. Collection of Jo McIntyre Bornemissza



Julie 111, 1988
'No 151'
Oil on hardboard
91.8 x 61 cm
Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery



Mark and Chloe, Two Delightful Little Rascals, 1988
Oil on board
91 x 122 cm
Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery

Timothy, 1983, oil on hardboard, 90.5 x 60 cm.
Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery.
Purchased from the artist by the Devonport City
Council, 1991

Claire, 1983, oil on hardboard, 91 x 60 cm.
Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery.
Purchased from the artist by the Devonport City
Council, 1992

Damon, 1985, oil on hardboard, 92 x 61 cm.
Collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art
Gallery. Purchased with assistance of the Public
Donation Fund, 1997

Julie III, 1988, oil on hardboard, 91.8 x 61 cm.
Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery.
Bequeathed to the Devonport Regional Gallery
by the Owen Gower Lade estate, 2008

Claire III, 1988, oil on hardboard, 91.8 x 60.5 cm.
Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery.
Bequeathed to the Devonport Regional Gallery
by the Owen Gower Lade estate, 2008

Mark and Chloe, Two Delightful Little Rascals, 1988,
oil on hardboard, 91 x 122 cm. Collection of the
Devonport Regional Gallery. Purchased from the
artist by the Devonport City Council, 1991



Colin, 1974

oil on hardboard

91.5 x 61.2 cm.

Collection of Devonport Regional Gallery. Bequeathed to the Devonport Regional Gallery by Owen Gower Lade estate, 2008

RECORDING NATURE

'Country devastated by man. What was once lovely rainforest is now scrub and stark bare rocks. Beautiful to a geologist, perhaps even paradise - but Hell and devastation to a botanist or zoologist.'
—Owen Lade, on reverse side of one of his sketches of Queenstown environs, 1974

Lade was an avid bushwalker. He trekked through much of the state's wilderness and over many of the surrounding islands, although he expressed a preference for rainforest. His knowledge of the native vegetation was considerable, as was his concern for the damage being done to the natural environment.

Ring Valley Williamsford, 1970, oil on paper, 22.7 x 25.5 cm. Collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Presented by Jo McIntyre, 2007

Sermon on the Mount, 1975, oil on paper, 22.7 x 25.5 cm. Collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Presented by Jo McIntyre, 2007

Shire Hall Beach, 1972, oil on paper, 16.8 x 20.6 cm. Collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Presented by Jo McIntyre, 2007

The Great Coat-hanger, 1972, oil on paper, 15.3 x 20.4 cm. Collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Presented by Jo McIntyre, 2007

Julia Percy Island from Port Fairy, 1976, oil on paper, 10.2 x 13.4 cm. Collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Presented by Jo McIntyre, 2007

Stoke's Point King Island, 1976, oil on paper, 12.9 x 21.8 cm. Collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Presented by Jo McIntyre, 2007

Prime Seal Island, date unknown, oil on paper, 12.9 x 21.8 cm. Collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Presented by Jo McIntyre, 2007

Cascades Road Hobart, not dated, oil and felt pen on paper, 13.3 x 24 cm. Collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Presented by Jo McIntyre, 2007

West Coast Series x 4, date unknown, oil pastel on paper, all 27.1 x 37.3 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Bequeathed to the Devonport Regional Gallery by the Owen Gower Lade estate, 1988

On the Gordon, Tasmania, 1987, oil on composition board, 60.5 x 91 cm. Collection of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston. Donated by John McPhee under the Cultural Gifts Program, 2003



Planes at Lake Pedder, 1990

Oil on hardboard

43.8 x 59 cm

Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery

Planes at Lake Pedder, 1990 (from sketch made in 1972), oil on hardboard, 43.8 x 59 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Purchased from Joan Walsh by the Devonport City Council, 1995

AIDE-MEMOIRES / REMEMBERING PLACES HOUSES

'Nature creates the most beautiful colours, but man-made objects such as houses often have drab hues which must be analysed into the colours of the rainbow.' —Owen Lade, from Lade: An exhibition of works 1948 - 1982 catalogue essay, Devonport Gallery and Arts Centre, 1983

In the tradition of watercolour paintings of buildings and streetscapes, Lade captured much of the state's iconic domestic architecture.

Untitled shed, 1983, watercolour on paper, 25.2 x 35.5 cm, date unknown. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Purchased from the artist by the Devonport City Council, 1983

Miss Crabbe's Garden, date unknown, (Dorothy Stoner's house in the background), oil on craft paper, 25.8 x 25 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Purchased from the artist by the Devonport City Council, 1983

Courtoys Point House, date unknown, watercolour on paper, 25.2 x 35.5 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Purchased from the artist by the Devonport City Council, 1992

Lighthouse Museum, Curry, King Island, watercolour on paper, 1982, 25.2 x 35.5 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Purchased from the artist by the Devonport City Council, 1992

Homedale, date unknown, watercolour on paper, 25.2 x 35.5 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Purchased from the artist by the Devonport City Council, 1992



Homedale, date unknown
Watercolour on paper
25.2 x 35.5 cm
Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery



The Great Coat Hanger, 1972

Oil on paper

15.3 x 20.4 cm

Collection of Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

Northdown sugar loaf, 1983, watercolour on paper,
17.8 x 25 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional
Gallery. Gift of the artist, 1983

St Luke's Anglican Sunday School, Campbell Town,
date unknown, watercolour on paper, 28.5 x 39.7
cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery.
Purchased from the artist by the Devonport City
Council, 1992

Abbott's Cordial Factory, 79 Paterson Street,
Launceston, 1968, watercolour on paper, 25.5 x 35.5
cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery.
Purchased from the artist by the Devonport City
Council, 1983

Cordial Factory, 19 Paterson Street, Launceston,
date unknown, pencil sketch in sketchbook,
27.4 x 37.4 cm. Collection of the Devonport
Regional Gallery. Purchased from the artist by the
Devonport City Council, 1992

TRAVELS

'Jerusalem is one of the world's most beautiful cities.' —Owen Lade, sketchbook annotation, 1982

In 1982 Lade travelled overseas to Scotland, Greece, Germany, Italy, France, Israel, Switzerland and Denmark. He filled many sketchbooks with annotated drawings of buildings and landscapes, recording in minimal outlines and text the colours and details of the places he visited. In subsequent years he coloured in these drawings and also copied them. These sketches were the inspiration for many of the Christmas cards he sent to relatives and friends.

Cathedral Street Glasgow, 1982, oil on paper, 21.2 x 13.1 cm. Collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Presented by Jo McIntyre, 2007

Westminster Abbey, 1982, oil on paper, 21.2 x 13.1 cm. Collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Presented by Jo McIntyre, 2007

Saronic Gulf Head, 1982, oil on paper, 12.4 x 21 cm. Collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Presented by Jo McIntyre, 2007

Sketches from overseas travel, 1982, watercolour on paper, dimensions various. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Bequeathed to the Devonport Regional Gallery by the Owen Gower Lade estate, 2008

3 Christmas cards representing scenes from: Jerusalem, 13.4 x 21.9 cm; Greece, 13 x 21.4 cm; and Katoomba, Sydney 12.7 x 21 cm. Watercolour and oil on card, dates unknown. Collection of Vivienne Breheney

5 Christmas cards representing scenes from: Israel, 12.7 x 17.1 cm; Saint Peters Basilica, Rome (2 cards) 13.1 x 19.2 cm and 12.9 x 20.3 cm; Germany, 11.7 x 21.2 cm; and Greece 12.9 x 21.8 cm. Watercolour on card and paper, dates unknown. Collection of Josephine Kelly



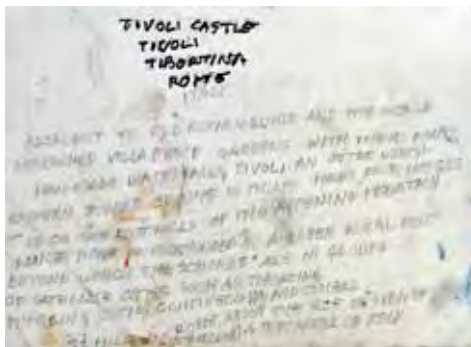
Mt Scopus, Jerusalem, Israel, date unknown
 Watercolour and oil on board
 13.4 x 21.9 cm
 Collection of Vivienne Breheny



Saint Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, Rome, Italy, date unknown,
 Watercolour on cardboard
 12.9 x 20.3
 Collection of Josephine Kelly



Tivoli Castle, Tiborina Rome, date unknown
 Watercolour on Paper
 21.6 x 29.8 cm
 Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery



Tivoli Castle, Tiborina Rome, date unknown
 Watercolour on Paper
 21.6 x 29.8 cm
 Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery

FINALE

'All great painters do self-portraits. Even John Constable, the landscape master, did his self-portrait.' —Owen Lade, Devonport City News, 20 July 1988

In his early sixties Lade's sight began to fail. He was diagnosed with glaucoma. Painting became increasingly difficult. This portrait was his farewell (or signals a farewell) to his life as a painter.

Yours sincerely, 1988, oil on hardboard, 121 x 90 cm,
Luke Wagner Collection

'First impressions may be that the work is simplistic and straight-forwardly representational, however on consideration the viewer can find a much higher level of expression closer to the rhythm and abstraction of music.' - Luke Wagner, Owen Gower Lade: A survey of work catalogue essay, 1994

Lade's final works, often reworked and painted over his much loved sketches, acquire an abstract musical quality that underpin his practice.

Stables behind Esk Bank houses, Lithgow, Blue Mountains', date unknown, watercolour on paper, 18.7 x 33 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Bequeathed to the Devonport Regional Gallery by the Owen Gower Lade estate, 2008

Untitled, date unknown, watercolour on paper, 26.5 x 37.3 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Bequeathed to the Devonport Regional Gallery by the Owen Gower Lade estate, 2008

Still life, date unknown, watercolour on paper, 39.6 x 27.7 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Bequeathed to the Devonport Regional Gallery by the Owen Gower Lade estate, 2008

Untitled, date unknown, still life, watercolour on paper, 55.6 x 39.7 cm. Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery. Bequeathed to Devonport Regional Gallery by the Owen Gower Lade estate, 2008

'Art has been the highlight of my life.' —Owen Lade, Mercury Newspaper, 25 July 1994

Dr Jane Deeth, 2012

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Group Shows

1955–59 The Herald Outdoor Art Show, Melbourne

1963, 1966 Art Society of Tasmania

1976–81 Burnie Coastal Art Group and Rotary Club of East Burnie

1978 Works from the Collection, Devonport Gallery and Arts Centre

1979 Images of Children, Burnie Regional Art Gallery

1981 Naive Art in Tasmania, Tasmanian School of Art Gallery, Mt Nelson Campus, Hobart

1982 North-West Inspired, Burnie Regional Art Gallery

1989 Genius Loci, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart. Curator: Nick Waterlow

Solo and two-person shows

1968 Owen Lade and Harold Ramsden, The Little Gallery, Devonport. Curator: Jean Thomas

1971 Owen Lade and Vivienne Breheny, The Little Gallery, Devonport. Curator: Jean Thomas

1975 February, Owen Lade, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery. Curator: John McPhee. Toured to The Little Gallery, Devonport

1983 Lade: An exhibition of works 1948–1982, Devonport Gallery and Arts Centre. Curator: Patrick McMurray

1988 Freeman Gallery, Hobart. Curator: Jill Freeman

1990 A prophet is not without honour: the portraits of Owen Gower Lade, Chameleon Gallery, Hobart. Curator: Jim Logan. Toured to the Devonport Gallery and Arts Centre (now Devonport Regional Gallery)

1993 Owen Lade's Life Process, Arthouse, Launceston. Curator: Felix Ratcliff

1994 Owen Gower Lade: A survey of work, Sidewalk Gallery, Hobart. Curator: Luke Wagner

1997 Owen Gower Lade: A Way of Looking, Sidewalk Gallery, Hobart. Curator: Ann Porteus

2004 Owen Gower Lade: Portraits, Devonport Regional Gallery. Curator: Jane Stewart



Owen Gower Lade (1922–2007) was born on 16 June 1922 in Hobart, Tasmania, son of Raymond Freear Lade, lawyer, and Phyllis Cardin Lade, née Lewis, teacher of French and English. From age 11, accompanied by two younger siblings, Lade received sketching lessons from modernist painter Dorothy Stoner who lived next door to the Lades at Lindisfarne, a suburb of Hobart. He began studying biological science 1940 at the University of Tasmania and briefly attended art school at the Technical College before serving in the Army Home Forces (1941–44). Lade resumed his science studies in 1944 and continued living in a tram in the garden at Lindisfarne after the family retired in 1945 to Latrobe in northern Tasmania.

In 1948 Lade transferred to the University of Melbourne where, in 1949, he graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Zoology. Whilst in Melbourne Lade worked as a laboratory assistant in the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories (1950–60); attended life classes conducted by George Sutton; and showed paintings (1955–59) in Herald Outdoor Art Exhibitions where critic Alan McCulloch once awarded him a prize.

Lade returned to Tasmania in 1960, where he worked briefly at the Commonwealth Health Laboratory, Launceston. In 1962 Lade began studying geology at the University of Tasmania in Hobart but was encouraged by New Zealand artist Helen Crabb, who rented the Lade house at Lindisfarne for about ten years, to focus on art.

From 1962, based at his parents' house 'Herberton' on Torquay Road, Latrobe, Lade studied at Launceston Technical College intermittently until 1970; exhibited in various Tasmanian cities from 1963; and worked as a cleaner, a gardener and, at the Ovaltine factory, a night watchman.

From 1975 to 1989 Lade lived independently at Bishton Street, Devonport. From 1974 he travelled widely interstate and from 1982 also to Europe and New Zealand. Suffering glaucoma and already blind in one eye, Owen Lade moved into Karingal Home for the Aged in 1989, and died in Devonport on 10 September 2007.

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Mt Farrell, 1972

Oil on hardboard

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Collection of the Devonport Regional Gallery

Biography Image:

Portrait of Owen Lade 1983

Bob Iddon

Black and white photograph commissioned by

Devonport Regional

Gallery for Homes of Devon Series, 1983



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