

CLIVE HUMPHREYS



ALL IN ALL

Paintings

Whakanewha, Waiheke Island

RDS Gallery
2026

CLIVE HUMPHREYS

ALL IN ALL

Essays on the Occasion of the Exhibition
Clive Humphreys: All in All, at RDS Gallery,
6 Castle Street, Dunedin,
16 January–28 February 2026

Occasional Essays Series
Editors
Alistair Fox and Hilary Radner

RDS GALLERY

Cover Image: *Counterpoint*, Clive Humphreys, 2024, acrylic on canvas, 1600mm x 600mm (courtesy of the artist).

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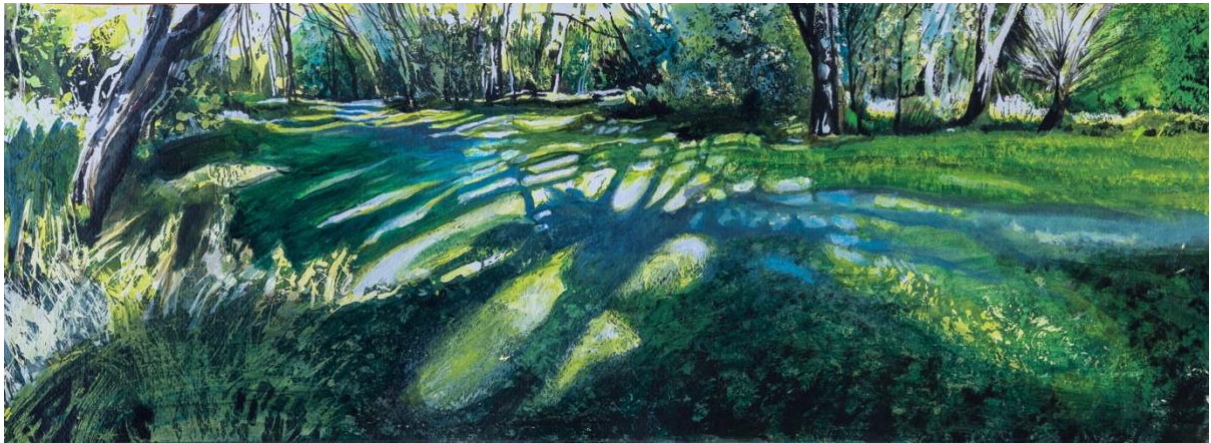
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Photographs courtesy Peter Rees

The *Stimmung*: Reflections on Clive Humphreys' *All in All*

By Philip Madill

In 1899, the Art historian Alois Riegl defined the viewer's immersion in landscape painting in his essay "Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst" *translated as "Mood as the Content of Modern Art"* as both a physical and psychological phenomenon.¹ That is, the painting not only envelops the viewer's visual perception but also transports them mentally, creating a greater sense of space. He referred to the interaction between the audience and the painting using the German word "*Stimmung*," which refers to the atmosphere or vibe of an environment. Although not easily translated into English, the word has its origins in music and comes from the verb "*Stimmen*," meaning to tune an instrument. In the context of landscape painting, *Stimmung* then refers to being

¹ Alois Riegl, "Mood as the Content of Modern Art," trans. Lucia Allais and Andrei Pop, *Grey Room*, no. 80 (2020): 26–37.

attuned with the natural environment. For Riegl, a landscape painting had to fulfil two conditions to produce *Stimmung*, namely, a sense of sureness and a distant view. A work that lacked these conditions would keep the audience in the present. He explains:

Such a subtle thing is this “*Stimmung*” that a nearby sign of life is enough to cast it to the wind. [...] It is the cross-checking of those elements—peace and distant view—from which “*Stimmung*” issues: movement and proximity have hurled me back into the struggle for existence.²

Therefore, the artist had to produce a painting in an isolated setting, such as a mountaintop or bay, to create the feeling of immersion in the viewer.

The exhibition, *Clive Humphreys: All in All—Paintings:*

Whakanewha, Waiheke Island (2026), also incorporates a similar use of *Stimmung* in his landscape paintings. The show is part of a larger body of work that Humphreys has been producing over the

² A. Riegl, “Mood as the Content of Modern Art,” 28-29.

past fifteen years, which explores the changing landscape of the island where he lives. In *Counterpoint (2024-25)*, reproduced on the cover of this booklet, the high placement of the horizon line and wide-angle perspective envelop the viewer, creating a panoramic effect. As the title suggests, the image depicts the contrast between the trees on the riverbank and their mirrored reflection in the foreground. The ripples produced by the currents refract the skyline as if creating another dimension. Humphreys states that the design of the composition places the viewer in the landscape, as if they are on the water, looking at the trees on the shoreline. The sense of space is reinforced by the silhouettes of trees and reflections on the water's surface, also alluding to the greater expanse of the landscape beyond the picture frame.³

Humphreys also removes extraneous aspects of modern life from the landscape such that the natural surroundings become the focal point of the painting. He states: "The quality of light, colour, forms, reflections, shadows in one moment must arouse my sustained curiosity. The consistent factor that attracts me is

³ Clive Humphreys with C. R. Lark, "All in All: Q&A," in *Clive Humphreys: All in All*, ed. Alistair Fox and Hilary Radner, Occasional Essays Series (Dunedin: RDS Gallery, 2026), n.p.

tranquillity."⁴ It is the tranquillity of the painting that evokes Alois Riegl's idea of peace as an immersive experience. That is, the viewer is allowed to be visually and mentally transported by the image of the landscape. For Riegl, the painting is the most effective way of capturing a sense of immersion or "*Stimmung*" in nature and transporting the viewer into a space of tranquillity.⁵ There, the viewer is free from external distractions. Humphreys also makes the same point in relation to his painting process and his increasing use of photography to build his images. He primarily paints in the studio due to the fluctuating weather patterns and constant change in the landscape. Humphreys argues that the space allows him to focus on the mark-making process rather than representation.

Both Humphreys' and Riegl's use of *Stimmung* is a reaction against the impact of technological expansion on the landscape at different times. For Riegl, *Stimmung* in landscape painting became a struggle for existence, as a way of escaping the ever-

⁴ Clive Humphreys, quoted in C. Humphreys, "All in All," n.p.

⁵ Matthias Krüger, "Painting Immersion: Hans Thoma's Landscapes." *Studies in Intermediality* no. 9 (2015): 324

encroaching industrialisation of late nineteenth-century Europe. Likewise, Humphreys views landscape painting in the digital age as equally relevant as it was to artists a hundred years earlier. He argues that the genre is less about celebrity or romanticising the environment, and more about awareness of its importance through observation. He states:

Optimism about the future feels unsustainable in today's circumstances, and so my painting is not only reflective of past values in terms of beauty but also shows my concern for the preservation of what I value in the present and for the future.⁶

As such, Humphrey's paintings are a testament to the enduring nature of landscape painting in contemporary art and its ability to immerse the viewer in moments of quiet contemplation.

⁶ Clive Humphrey, quoted in C. Humphreys, "*All in All*," n.p.



Clive Humphreys, *Upbeat*, 2024–2025, acrylic on canvas, 1600mm x 600mm.



Clive Humphreys, *Ripple*, 2024–2025, acrylic on canvas, 1600mm x 600mm.



Clive Humphreys, *Loop*, 2024–2025, acrylic on canvas, 595mm x 220mm.

Photographs courtesy Peter Rees

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All in All: Q&A

By Clive Humphreys with C. R. Lark

Q: After Impressionism and in the current era of digital art, video art and installation, is painting from nature an anachronism?

A: I believe nature as a subject is crucial now, even more relevant to us than to those living in the age of the Impressionists, which was also the time of industrialisation. Now attention to nature is a matter of urgency rather than solely a celebration of its grandeur. Optimism about the future feels unsustainable in today's circumstances and so my painting is not only reflective of past values in terms of beauty, but also shows my concern for the preservation of what I value in the present and for the future.

Q: What is the starting point for your painting?

In terms of subject matter, the starting point for work over the last fifteen years has been and still is living on Waiheke Island and regularly engaging with a particular area with all its seasonal, weather and light changes. During that time, I've paid close attention to different aspects of the location, which reflect those changes.

Q: Are there any influences that feed into the process?

A: The example of other painters, both historical and contemporary is often assumed to be of primary importance for painters. I agree that looking at paintings is an essential activity in the same way that we would expect a writer to be a diligent and attentive reader. Close observation of individual works by other artists reveals guiding attitudes and beliefs that underpin the why and how, which are useful as I form and modify my own attitudes and philosophy towards my work. And I learn as much from writers and musicians as I do from painters. "Learn" is perhaps the wrong word because this is not a matter of study but more an absorption. I read every day. Most recently, I've been reading Bellow, Nabokov and Mailer, plus I often return to the poetry of Emily Dickinson. Access to great writers is easier than access to great painting, which is logistically more difficult in New Zealand. I go to galleries when the opportunity arises. Looking at photographs of paintings doesn't count! A photograph of a painting misses most of its materiality and particularly the surface handling. The novel works on the reader through its particularities, from the precision of language and individual sentence construction to the structural control of the narrative. The "voice" of a novel, its cadences and rhythms have their equivalence in painting. The avoidance of cliché and generalisation of description in text has direct correspondence to the specifics of descriptive paint handling. How this is achieved while maintaining a lively luminosity. . . well that's the challenge.

Q: Is there any other way writers have impacted your art practice?

Novelists commonly write through a process of drafts. The equivalent of a first draft in my painting is a completed initial composition of the subject. I'm not too worried about nuances, more about seeing the image's components—composition, horizon line, colour and tonal values—this is my way of understanding the whole painting's potential and very much the starting point. Revisions often involve completely repainting many times the areas that require radical adjustments. In fact, the entire painting process addresses what's wrong in the same way a writer works, cutting and editing, towards a final draft. Approaching the end of the painting, the concern is to balance the elements to make a coherent entity.

Q: What quality is of primary importance for you in the finished painting?

A: All works in this exhibition are moments in a regular walk along the shore and the forest paths at Whakanewha. Those moments have literally stopped me in my tracks. The quality of light, colour, forms, reflections, shadows in one moment must arouse my sustained curiosity. The consistent factor that attracts me is tranquillity. Saul Bellow, an author whose writing I admire, sums up this quality:

I feel that art has something to do with the achievement of stillness in the midst of chaos. A stillness which characterizes prayer, too, and the eye of the storm. I think that art has

something to do with an arrest of attention in the midst of distraction.

Saul Bellow

Q: You mention music as another influence, is there a correlation between music and painting?

Just as I listen to novels via audio books while I'm painting—most recently Dickens and Hemingway—I also work to music. Jazz pianists, for example Chick Corea and Bill Evans, two of my favourite composers, were both classically trained in the same way that Hockney went to the Royal College of Art and Frances Hodgkins studied at the Dunedin School of Art and in London, before developing their own approaches. I'm particularly interested how pianists relate the right-hand treble with the left-hand bass notes, which is a direct correlation with my use of light and shade. Tonal range, whether narrow or broad, establishes compositional structure. Tree shadows and light through foliage play together in counterpoint in a musical-like rhythm to make pattern.

Q: Can you describe your use of perspective and space in the paintings?

A: In the organic environment there are no straight lines of perspective to provide us with cues of distance. In landscape painting distance is suggested by the scale and activity of mark-making. High energy, agitated marks advance, whereas relaxed,

calmly applied marks retreat. With my typically high horizon lines a retreating plane of the ground moving off into the distance is achieved by the ground texture diminishing in scale; I use smaller denser marks to describe far distances and bigger looser marks to describe the foreground. This approach is most clearly evident in Van Gogh's drawings.



Vincent Van Gogh, *The Harvest (for Emile Bernard)*, 1888, pen and ink on paper, 319mm x 242mm.¹

Q: Your choice of compositional format has a horizontal emphasis—why?

A: The width of the image suggests the human viewpoint of a landscape. The extended peripheral view of this format gives the viewer an immersive sensation. Inclusion of cast shadows and reflections of elements outside the picture plane suggests the

¹ Sourced from Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vincent_van_Gogh_-_The_Harvest_\(for_Émile_Bernard\)_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vincent_van_Gogh_-_The_Harvest_(for_Émile_Bernard)_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)

space depicted continues beyond the edges of the painting into the viewer's personal space and even behind and above the viewer. This facilitates an awareness of the sky without my painting it; effectively the viewer becomes the figure in the landscape.

To enter water is, of course, to cross a border. You pass the lake's edge, the sea's shore, the river's brink—and in so doing you arrive at a different realm, in which you are differently minded because differently bodied.

Robert Macfarlane

Q: Does this link with the lack of figures in your work?

A: People, birds, animals, boats, buildings always become the focal point of a landscape image, because we are genetically predisposed to pay particular attention to activity in the environment in case it may be useful or threatening to us. So often natural surroundings are seen as a backdrop to human pursuits and consequently go unnoticed in the fullest sense of perception. An example of this is the work of John Constable, who invariably included references to animals and humans in nature, also Claude Lorrain, who turned landscape into historical painting centring on particular events. They were both meeting the aesthetic preferences of the age in which they were painting.

Q: What are the technical aspects of making these paintings?

A: I use glazing medium mixed with paint, also paint straight from the tube as well as thinned with airbrush medium. Because the surface of the final painting covers many layers of revision, including areas that have been obliterated and painted white where I've started again, the natural transparency of the acrylic paint reveals deeper layers. Acrylic washes are achieved by using glazing mediums. Simply adding water weakens the surface integrity of the painting. The glazing medium controls the degree of transparency and allows me to mix colour on the surface of the canvas or paper. Layers of diffused colour are unified by a transparent overlay of a single colour. The base colours reflect the light back through the surface colour to create an optically mixed new colour. Acrylic paint dries quickly, so I don't need to wait days between applying layers as I would with oil paint. I work with a brush in one hand and a hair dryer in the other.

Q: How do you achieve the textural qualities in the work?

A: I use a liquid stop-out to create stencil-like brush marks, which I later erase to reveal the underneath colour. Working from light to dark protects the lighter layers beneath. This technique borrows heavily from my printmaking experience.

Q: What are the differences between painting on canvas and on paper?

A: Canvas requires sealing with an acrylic sealant and priming with six coats of gesso whereas good quality 300 gram paper requires stretching and one coat of gesso. The critical difference is

the scale of the work. On the smaller paper paintings it's easier to work quickly over the total surface. This means I can see more rapidly the whole structure of the composition. These smaller works take days to make while the larger canvas works often take months.

Q: Do you make preliminary drawings or paintings on site for these paintings?

A: These days I'm making fewer sketches directly from the subject, because of practical difficulties incurred by the weather, for example recent rainstorms and flooding. I've come to rely on multiple photographs taken on site that connect when I collage them in the studio for reference. Also, the paintings take longer to complete, sometimes months, so it would be impractical to keep returning to the same place, given it's in constant flux, altering with the variabilities and inconsistencies of weather, seasons and tides. For instance, recently a huge branch of a Pōhutukawa hundreds of years old that I've painted four times collapsed under its own weight to radically change the tree's shape. However, I'm not making a landscape, I'm making a painting. So, at some stage in that process, not having the landscape in front of me is an advantage, because slowly the focus becomes more on the mark-making than on the source. For Whistler, the artwork's purpose was not to document nature but to achieve "tonal harmony," similar to how a musician composes a musical piece, and in 1865 he abandoned the Impressionistic practice of painting outdoors.

Painting from nature! Needs to be done at home!

James McNeill Whistler

Q: Would you say you identify physically with the place that you are painting?

A: Yes, the act of painting requires a physical projection. A transformation of sight into gesture, an accumulation of painted marks that makes an illusion of space. That translation from observation to physical response is at the core of painting. Conversely, so much of Modernism is about an intellectual process of simplification and summary, which seems to me a contradiction of the complexity of nature. The effect of this simplification is often to tidy up, a compulsion evident in many domestic gardens where control wins out over what John Fowles calls “the Green Chaos.” I’ve always been drawn to organic untidiness and an acknowledgement of decomposition and death.

Q: How do you convey this relationship to the viewer?

A: These paintings do not seek to generalise, catastrophise or romanticise place rather, through a focus on particularity and uniqueness, to connect place to maker and viewer through tactile identification. With painted marks it's possible to reach out and touch, to feel the weight and texture of a place.

Q: You say that nature is a matter of urgency and your painting reflects your values, what precisely do you mean?

A: The forest and the sea have shaped our world, transforming wasteland into an environment where life can thrive. I respect their power more than I respect human political power, which is currently transforming an environment where life can thrive into a wasteland.

. . . trees seem almost godlike, using their biochemical wizardry to transform the Earth . . . Element by element, trees have learned to control water, air, fire and the ground beneath us, as well as fungi, plants, animals and even people.

Charlie Gilmour²

² Charlie Gilmore, "The Genius of Trees by Harriet Rix Review—How Trees Rule the World," *The Guardian*, 8 August 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/aug/08/the-genius-of-trees-by-harriet-rix-review-how-trees-rule-the-world>.

Contributors

Clive Humphreys is a printmaker and painter whose work is represented in many private and public collections, Museum of New Zealand/Te Papa Tongarewa, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, The Hocken/Uare Taoka o Hākana-University of Otago, and Christchurch Art Gallery/Te Puna o Waiwhetū. Recently he has developed a focus on watercolour and drawing to explore the ancient primeval process of forest and landscape on Waiheke Island where he lives, and now works in acrylics as well. His fascination with watercolour was the result of a research visit to London in 2012. His technical development of this medium is crucially informed by his stencil-making experience in printmaking. Clive graduated from Kingston College of Art and Design, London, in 1970. Since then, he has worked and exhibited extensively in New Zealand. In particular, he taught at the Dunedin School of Art from 1987-2019. In 2015, he was the recipient of a National Tertiary Teaching Excellence.

C. R. Lark is a fiction writer, poet and radio/stage playwright, published, broadcast and performed in NZ, UK, France and Australia. She lectures in Creative Writing and has run WORDSMITH courses at the University of Canterbury, the University of Auckland, the University of Otago, The Creative Hub, Auckland, Waiheke Island Summer Schools and Waiheke Community Arts and currently for Waiheke Adult Learning 2019–2024. She is a mentor for the NZ Society of Authors (Pen NZ Inc) Mentorship Programme. She has an Honours Degree in Art History & Education from Cambridge University, UK.

Philip Madill is a Dunedin-based artist whose practice explores the historical relationship between photography and drawing. He exhibits regularly with Olga Gallery, Dunedin, and his work is highly regarded and widely collected. In 2013, he completed a Master of Fine Arts from the Dunedin School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, awarded with Distinction. In addition to his Bachelor of Fine Arts (Otago Polytechnic, 2009), he holds a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in History, University of Otago (2005), as well as a BA Honours, majoring in Art History, University of Canterbury (2016). Philip is currently working towards a Doctor of Philosophy in Art and Design at the Auckland University of Technology. He brings, then, to his writing a deep knowledge of art from both practice-based and scholarly perspectives.

