



MASTERPIECE LONDON 30 JUNE TO 6 JULY 2022

JOHN MEYER

The Planet Earth Collection



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A space traveller would notice Planet Earth from afar. Among lifeless celestial bodies and an incandescent sun hangs a bright blue orb daubed with fresh white. It moves serenely through space, cloaked in a gaseous gown that allows an extraordinary phenomenon to endure. Life.

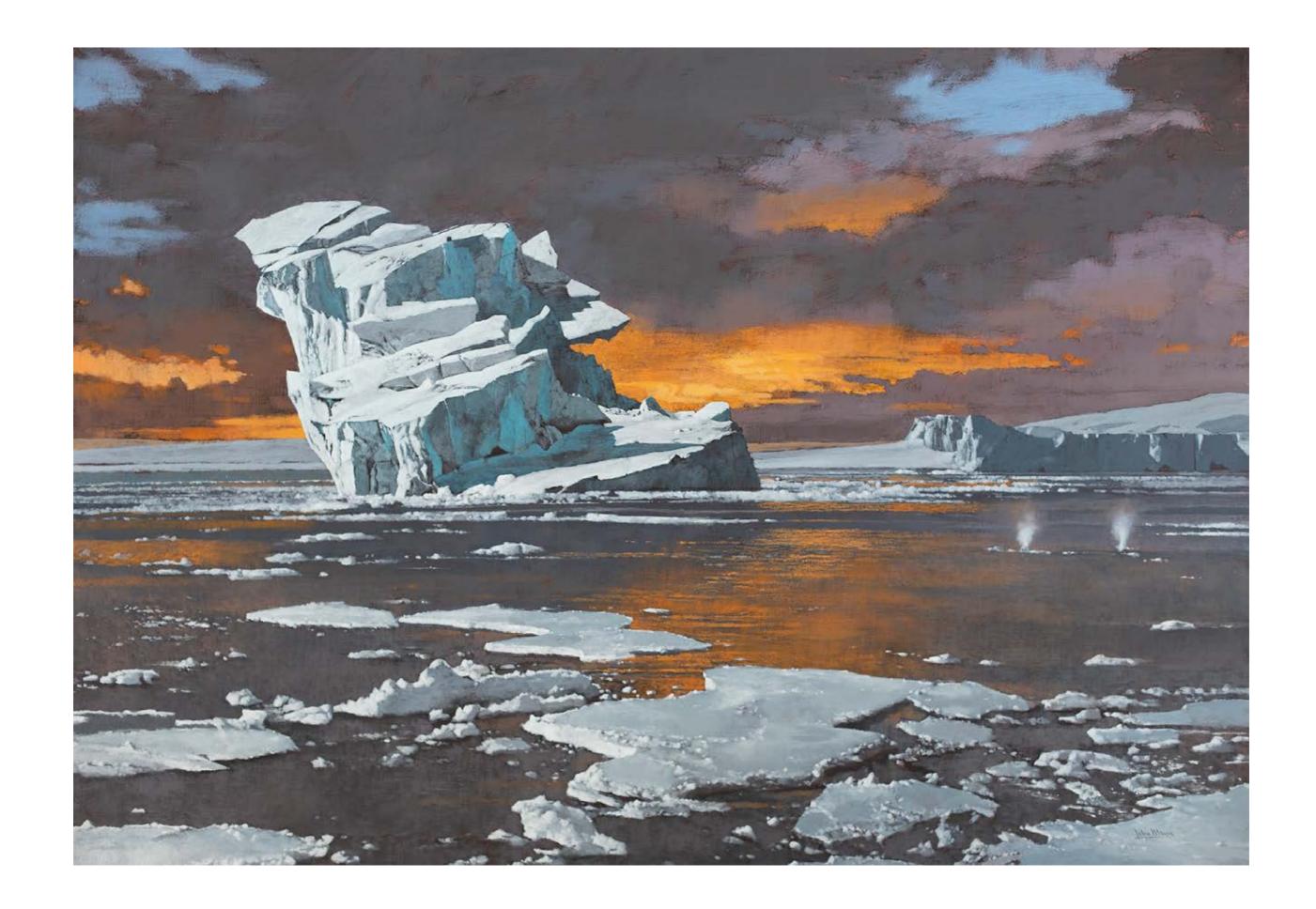
A mere one hundred kilometres of gas molecules form the blanket that allows water to exist in liquid form. This is the necessary crucible without which life cannot exist. The same gossamer atmosphere has shielded life's delicate membranes from annihilation by solar radiation as it evolved and colonized a fresh new world. For eons life ebbed and flowed in the primaeval soup. Uncountable trillions of unicellular organisms seeped oxygen into the atmosphere, allowing complex organisms to develop, coexisting in an astonishing, sustainable balance. Animals have since evolved ever more specialized modes of behaviour, some furtively transferring their genes from generation to generation. Others boldly flash their brilliance to prospective mates and call as loudly as they are able, celebrating life in their own little patch on this incomparable planet.

For the first time in our world's history, one species has attained utter domination. Humankind now controls the

levers of power for all life, from the deepest oceanic beds to the densest of ancient forests. The burning of fossil fuel in recent decades is changing the atmosphere more quickly than non-human processes have done since the formation of this planet. The very name we gave ourselves — Homo sapiens ('wise man') — would indicate that humankind seeks to live in harmony with our fellow earthlings, and nurture the only home we will ever have. So far, however, that path to a gentle and sustainable future appears to be beyond our collective leadership.

Internationally recognized artist John Meyer has spent his life observing and celebrating the landscapes, skies and seas of this world through his work. In his travels, he has witnessed the insidious and seemingly inexorable alterations to nature caused by human activity. Meyer felt helpless yet outraged. He spent twenty-four months creating a body of work that he hopes will be a monument to the intoxicating grandeur of places and habitats that will diminish and finally die if we humans continue with business as usual. This is John Meyer's offering: an attempt both to record his awe in the face of the sublime as well as raise a bright red flag about its future.

- Mark Read, 2021



ANTARCTICA

Humpback Haven mixed media on canvas 160 x 230 cm 63 x 90.5 inches





AMAZON

Waorani mixed media on canvas 160 x 230 cm 63 x 90.5 inches





PATAGONIA

Hanging Glacier
mixed media on canvas
160 x 230 cm
63 x 90.5 inches





COLORADO RIVER

Buzzards mixed media on canvas 160 x 230 cm 63 x 90.5 inches





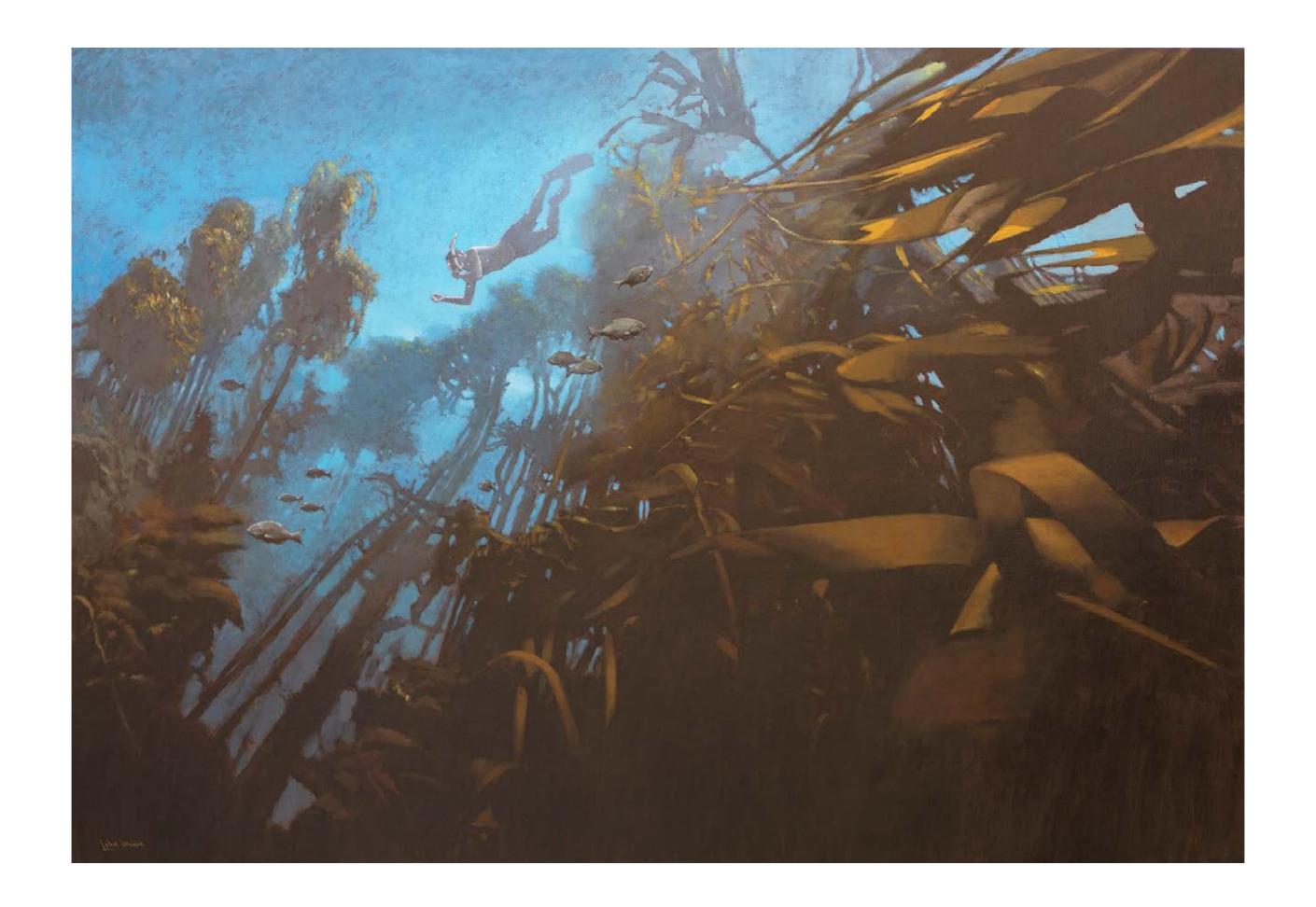
KENYA

Kilimanjaro mixed media on canvas 160 x 230 cm 63 x 90.5 inches





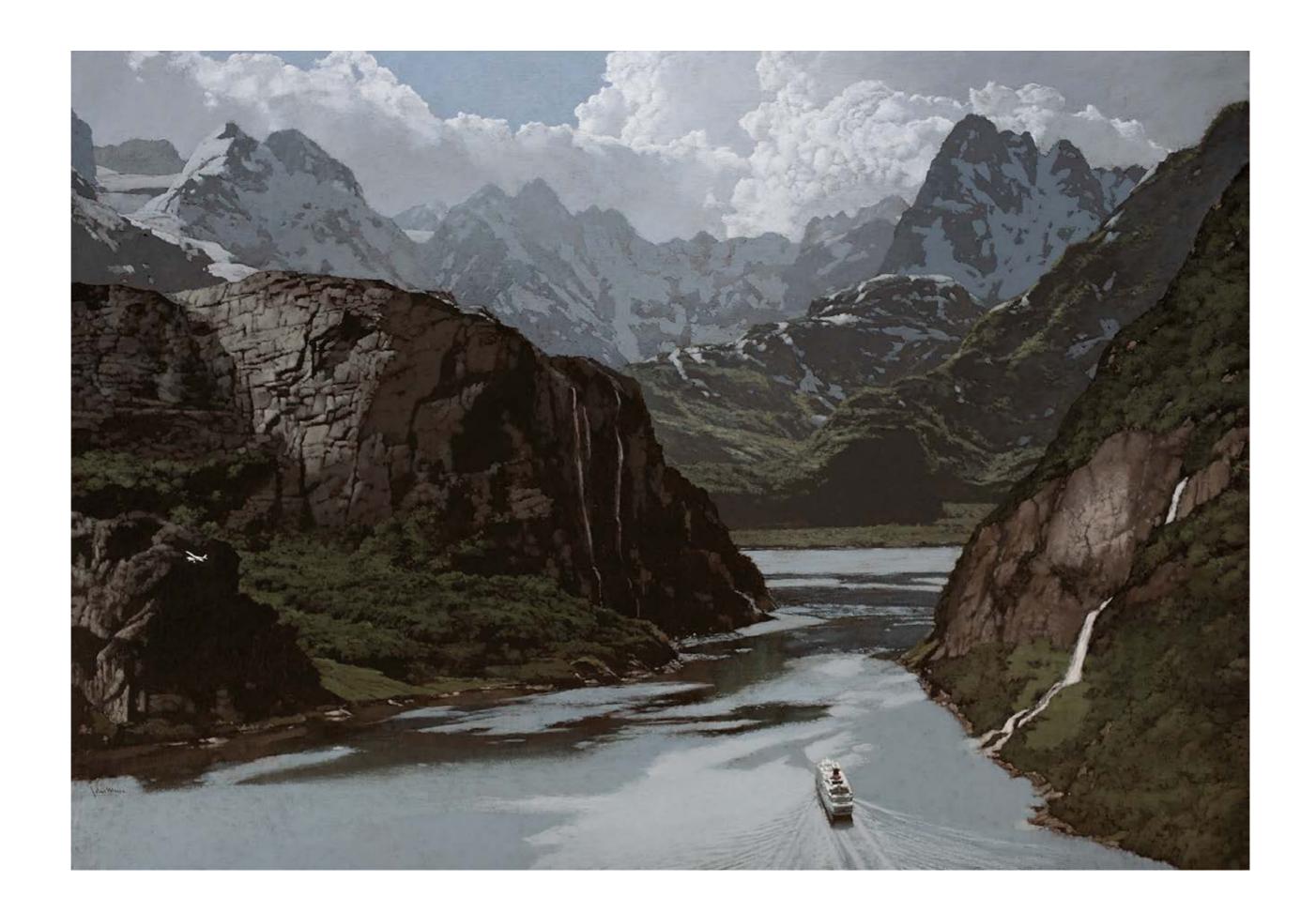
Reef
mixed media on canvas
160 x 230 cm
63 x 90.5 inches



SOUTH AFRICA

Cape Kelp Forest mixed media on canvas 160 x 230 cm 63 x 90.5 inches





NORWAY

Fjord Legends
mixed media on canvas
160 x 230 cm
63 x 90.5 inches





BORNEO

Sarawak mixed media on canvas 160 x 230 cm 63 x 90.5 inches

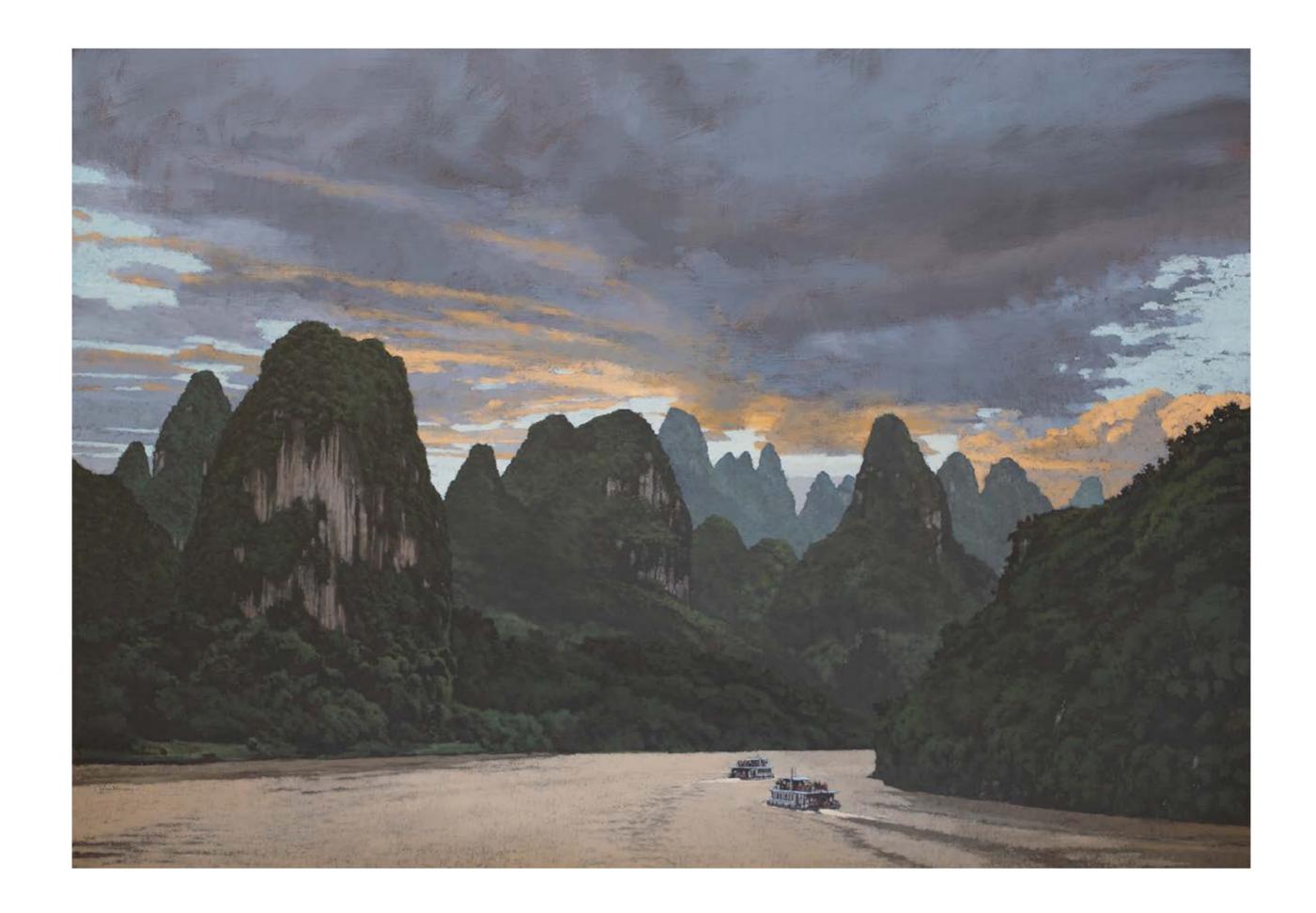




ITALY

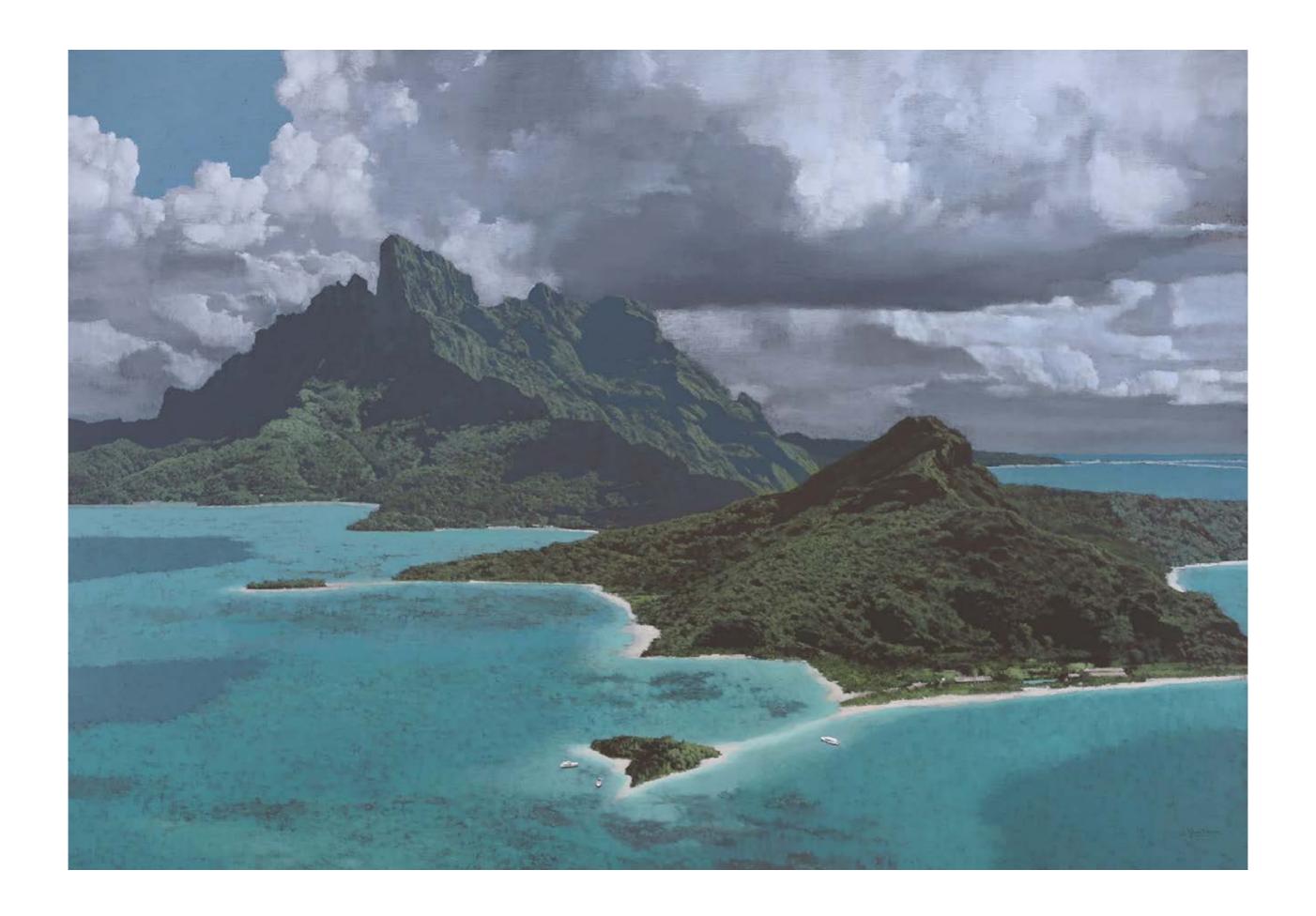
A Venetian Summer mixed media on canvas 160 x 230 cm 63 x 90.5 inches





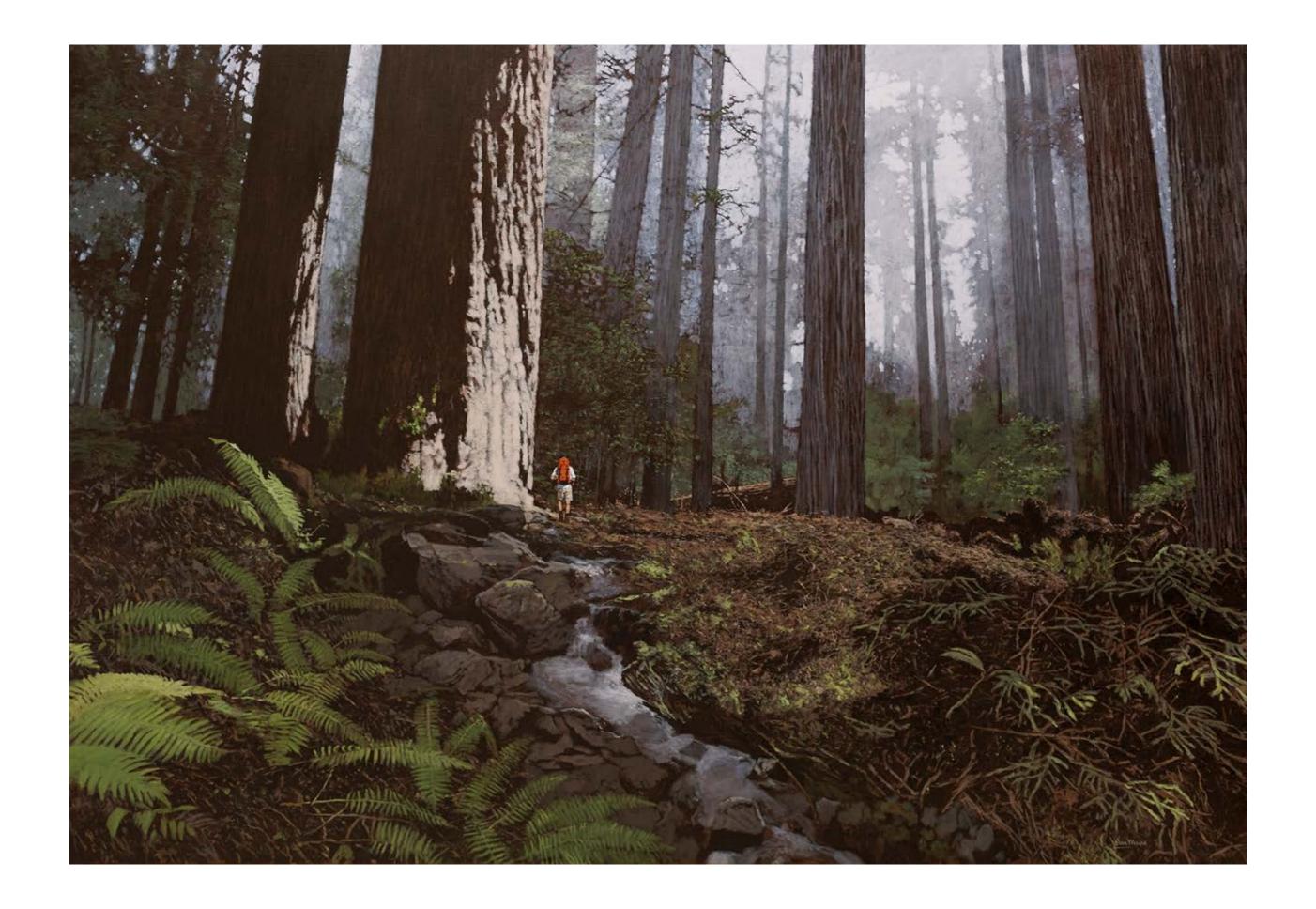
CHINA

Li Jiang mixed media on canvas 160 x 230 cm 63 x 90.5 inches



BORA BORA

South Seas mixed media on canvas 160 x 230 cm 63 x 90.5 inches



USA

Western Sentinels
mixed media on canvas
160 x 230 cm
63 x 90.5 inches







EGYPT

Sphinx mixed media on canvas 160 x 230 cm 63 x 90.5 inches

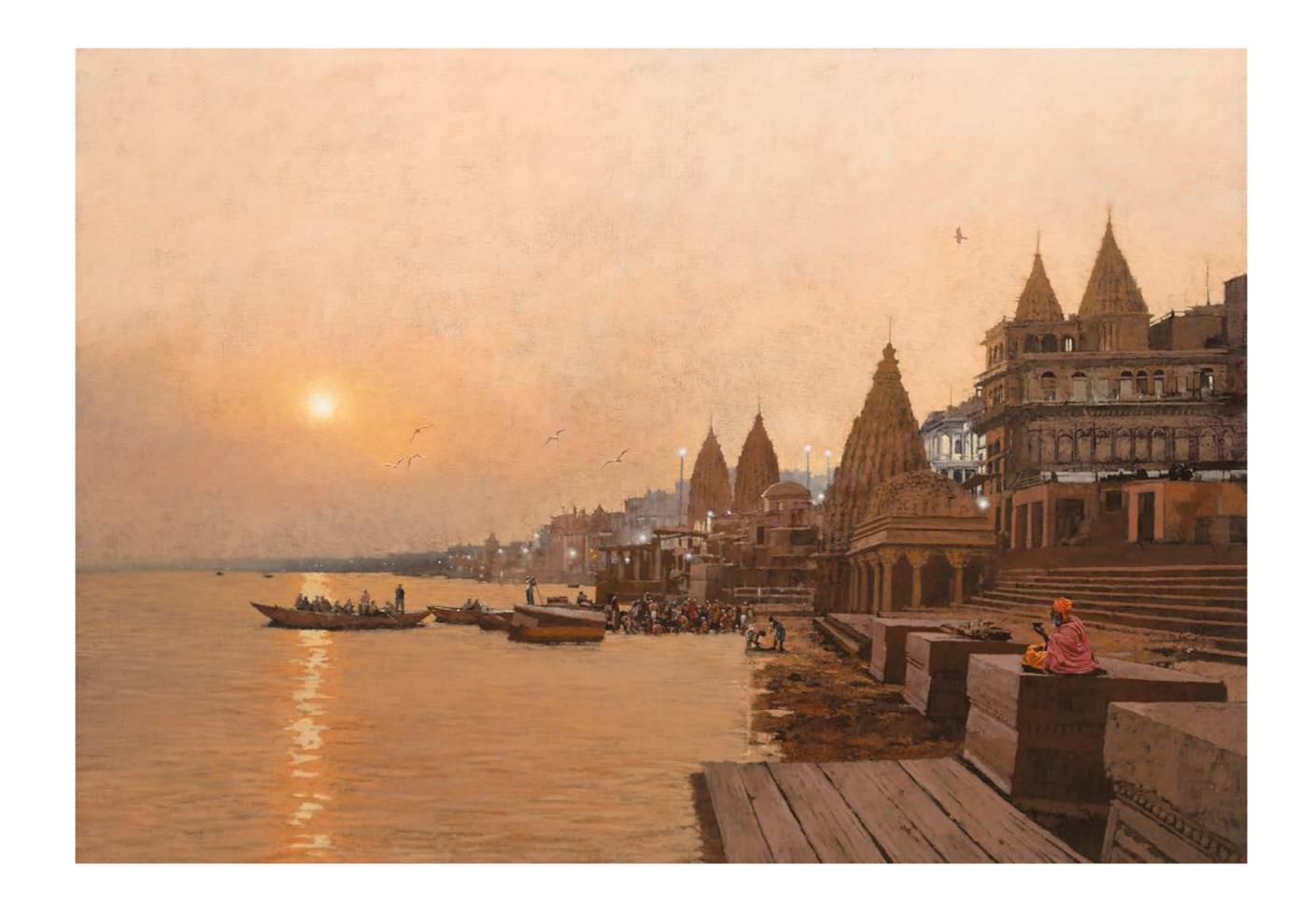




ARCTIC CIRCLE

Aurora mixed media on canvas 160 x 230 cm 63 x 90.5 inches





INDIA

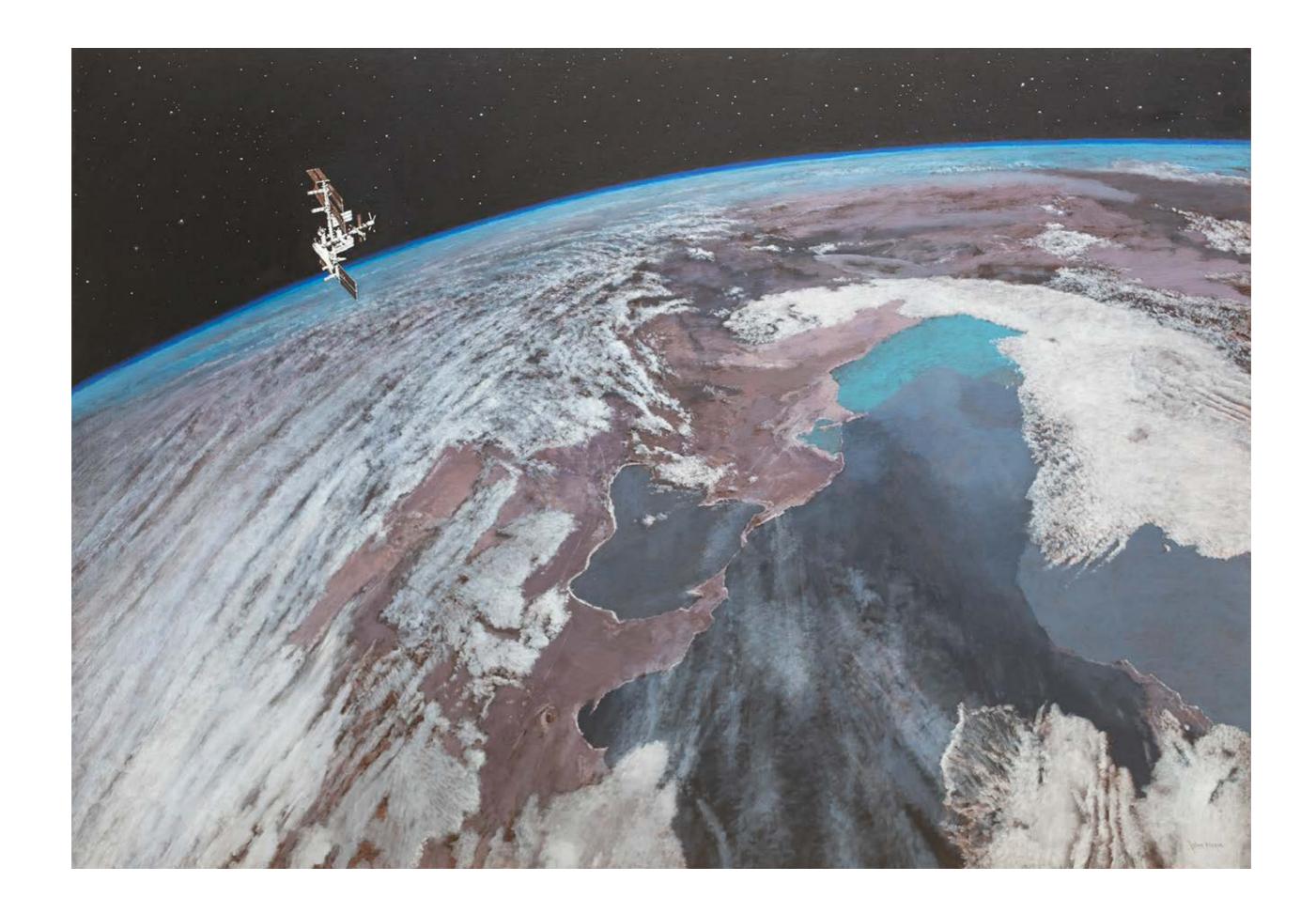
Ganga mixed media on canvas 160 x 230 cm 63 x 90.5 inches



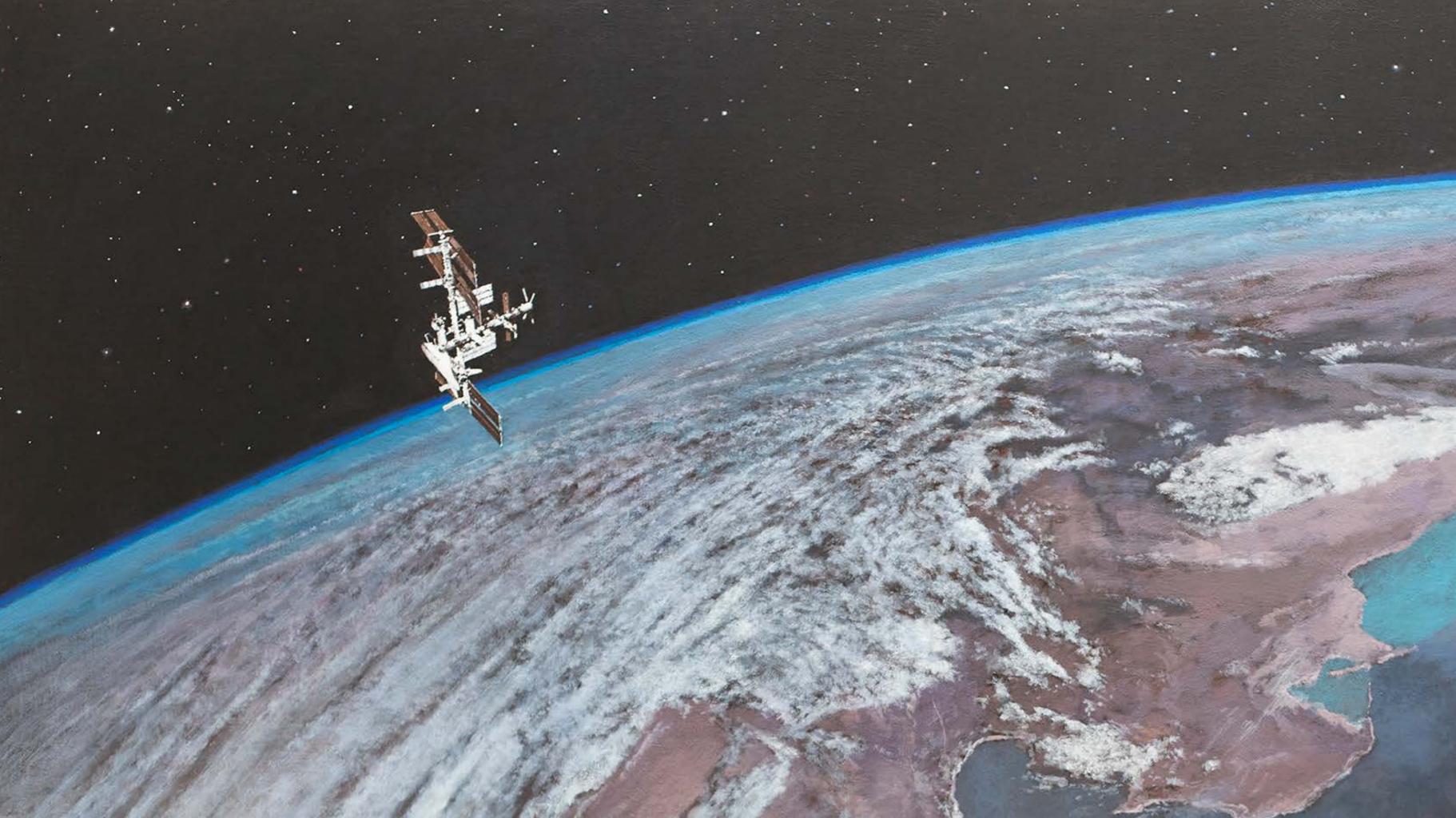


Flight of the Albatross mixed media on canvas 160 x 230 cm 63 x 90.5 inches





Our Blue Planet mixed media on canvas 160 x 230 cm 63 x 90.5 inches





IN CONVERSATION WITH JOHN MEYER

John, you have been synonymous with capturing the essence of South African landscapes. This body of work, while still landscape, is a departure. Tell us about the genesis of the works.

The single biggest topic at the moment is our part in climate change and, although it has been there in my mind, like everyone else, I could not find a way to express my concerns. I was awakened when I went to Antarctica and saw the extent of glacier and ice shelf calving.

I discussed my ideas with my wife Gill while onboard a ship off the Antarctic peninsula. What started as an idea for a work, soon became the seed of something much bigger. Why not show my outrage in a positive way? All the wonderful places I have been to on our planet are under threat. Everything is vulnerable. What you see now is easily destroyed. Look at how beautiful it all is now. Lets keep it that way.

This series of large paintings feels to be a poignant love letter to planet Earth, one you've been writing in increments for more than half a century, and which has culminated in these soaring landscapes and vistas. Tell us about your vision and ambitions when setting out to create this collection.

I tried to stick to places I have visited and to recall the emotions felt while there. One has to be careful when approaching something on this scale. The chances are one will come up short.

You have crisscrossed the globe to reach each of the places you chose to paint – many of them far-flung and not easily accessible. Did you set out with a list of places or was it a more organic process which evolved over time?

Both actually. Some were self-evident to me. Having been to Venice many times, I could see the slow damage being done. Patagonia being so remote and so big needed more research.

The whole two-year project evolved without knowing where I was going. I feel too much planning would have sucked the life out of it.

You've talked in the past about using devices that help the viewer feel they know and understand a particular landscape. Tell us how you deployed these sleights of hand in this series of works.

This collection required a different approach. Usually, I introduce subliminal devices to jog hidden memory. That couldn't work here. Most viewers would not have been to most of these places. Having said that, many would have seen something on TV or elsewhere that could jog the subconscious.

What do you hope people will feel when they look at these new paintings?

I have long since learnt that it is futile to expect others to feel what I feel in my work. It is best to not to anticipate a response. Do what I do and hope I communicate something.

But in these paintings, I have a mission, and that is to awaken a joy in our environment that will open people's eyes to the beauty of what we have, and do what is possible to preserve it.

You've referenced artists like Hopper and Wyeth as early influences on your work. Were there other influences – people or events – more recently which had a bearing on your decision to make this body of work and the choices you made?

I have been doing my thing for a long time and the influences along the way have been too many to mention. For this collection there were no outside visible influences I can think of, other than conversations with people that are knowledgeable about the environment, like Mark Read, who helped in my research. All influences of a painterly nature came years before, such as Degas, Velasquez, Homer, Lopez Garcia and many others.

The 18th century poet and philosopher Friederich Schiller, while contemplating the absence of landscape in Greek art and drama, posited that as 'they had not lost nature in themselves, they had no desire to create objects external to them, in which they could recover it'. He goes on to say that 'as nature begins gradually to vanish from human life, so we see it emerge in the world of the poet as an idea'. Given that these musings were contemporaneous with the emergence of Turner, Constable and Friederich, and landscape's ascendence as a subject at a time when the major European cities were littered with horse manure and cesspools, do you think contemporary landscape's moment has arrived again at a time of climate emergency?

Landscape as a subject in itself is a relatively new concept. All subject matter has emerged from our manmade environment.

Turner, Constable and Friederich all worked in a manmade

landscape. It's a point I make in most of my landscape work. It's the presence of man shaping the land. A continuance of this is the cityscapes of Lopez Garcia, where the city IS the landscape. In the 19th century the Hudson River School, with artists like Church and Kensett, had an idealistic vision of the American wilderness, untouched by man. For most of my *Planet Earth* series, the hand of humanity and its potential destructive influence is hidden. But we have definitely become more aware of our landscape environment, and our need to preserve it.

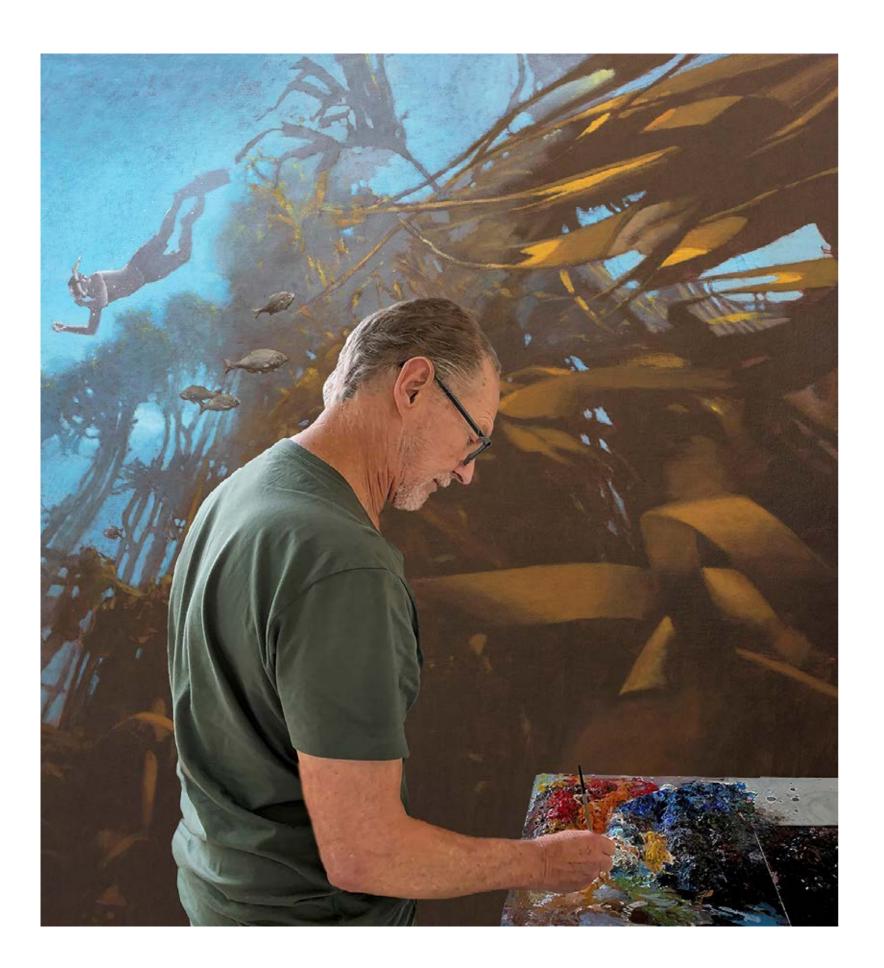
You've been in your studio for some six decades. So, what do you think good art does? What do you think art is for?

Well, traditionally it is what makes us human. No other species makes art. I think we do it in search of our spirituality. Be it for whatever we believe in, we are searching all the time and those of us who are blessed with the ability to be creative just do it more visibly than the rest.

You turn 80 this year (2022). Do you think more about your legacy and, if so, are these *Planet Earth* works an important part of what you hope will be your legacy?

This series is the largest project I have ever done and, I think, some of the best work I have ever done. It took two years and was physically demanding. Strangely, Covid was the perfect excuse to stay home, working in my studio, undisturbed by socialising. As for my legacy, it is my entire body of work. This *Planet Earth* series, because of its uniqueness, is definitely a major part of it.





JOHN MEYER

John Meyer is regarded as the leading figure in the realist movement in southern Africa. Decidedly contemporary in his unique vision and a student of modernism, Meyer has maintained a commitment to representational painting. Apart from landscapes, figurative works and portraiture, Meyer has painted four series of large canvases on the Anglo Boer War, the life of Nelson Mandela, immigrants and migration, and the life of Queen Elizabeth II.

In the *Planet Earth* series he has created a celebration of nature's raw beauty and the many wonders of the built environment to draw audiences into the urgent conversation about climate change and the need to protect our planet.

Lost in the Dust, a series on the Anglo Boer War, offers an intimate and compelling look at how war affects the lives of those swept up in it. The paintings are not historical, but a collection of completely fictitious, imaginative narratives, woven together to deal with the tragedy of war. The opening was held at Circa Gallery, Johannesburg, in 2015, followed by Bonhams in London and Edinburgh.

Mandela, A Life's Journey, based on the life of Nelson Mandela, came next. Meyer showed us what might have happened behind the scenes, before Mandela became an icon, as well as his journey to becoming president. The world tour of the collection, in collaboration with the Nelson Mandela Foundation, began in Melbourne, Australia, in September 2018.

Migrations is a series that depicts the many tribes that came into southern Africa, forming the diverse region that it is today. Meyer captures the heartache, the personal stories and the triumphs of these people.

Elizabeth, A Sovereign's Journey, is a collection of eleven paintings on the remarkable life of Queen Elizabeth II, from childhood to sovereignty to grandmotherhood. It captures the woman behind the throne and her lifelong dedication to duty. This series was exhibited at the Saatchi Gallery in London in May 2018.

Established in 1913 | Modern and contemporary art from South Africa

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Gallery opening hours: Monday to Thursday 10am — 6pm | Friday 10am — 5pm Saturday 12pm — 4pm

Masterpiece opening hours: 30 June to 6 July 2022 11am – 7pm or 9pm www.masterpiecefair.com

PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS

Gillian Meyer