

# MATTHEW COUPER

05 - 28 MAY 2023

MAGMA GALLERIES, 5 BEDFORD ST, COLLINGWOOD, VIC

OPENING RECEPTION: FRIDAY 05 MAY, 6-8pm



*Matthew Couper studio, Mojave Desert, USA, 2023*

MAGMA Galleries is thrilled to present USA-based Aotearoa / New Zealand born artist Matthew Couper's first solo exhibition in Australia, launching on Thursday 04 of May. This exhibition coincides with the announcement of an artist residency program awarded to Matthew with *Urban Art Projects* (UAP). Matthew will be flying from the USA to participate in the exhibition and residency program in May 2023.

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5 BEDFORD ST, COLLINGWOOD, 3066  
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Matthew Couper is an Aotearoa / New Zealand-born artist living and working in the USA. His art over the past twenty-five years mined western Art History practices ranging from early Italian Renaissance to Spanish and Mexican Baroque.

From the middle of 2019, desert island landscapes, moody skies enveloped with plumes of smoke, eyeballs with decorative tears, nails and Malevich-like constructions inhabit the canvases. Modes of survival are presented in tools such as the fire-starting bow drill and the ominous shark fin in the surrounding sea. Constructions provide shelter.



Matthew Couper, *Crying Bowdrill*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 140 x 100 cm

“The bigger picture is about survival ... the *Social Isolation* phenomenon is prevalent in a time where the world population is at its highest ever; questioning how we live, or don't live in relation



to others and false senses of security - not ready for slight shifts in the environment or other chaotic factors in society... With my new paintings, I've started off with the term 'desert island' to tie where I live now in the Mojave with where I come from in Aotearoa / New Zealand - especially in a world of pandemic peril - the term 'Desert Island' reconnecting my two worlds in paint."

'Couper is an artist with a Kafkaesque view of the world' - Californian art critic John Seed commented. His art, spurred on by hostile desert dwelling, oscillate between didactic talismans of impending anthropogenic doom to more insular and psychological spaces. Paintings describe desert mesa psycho-scapes and murky sea-surrounded islands, presided over hovering tools of survival and make-shift shelter, all while reveling in aesthetic constructive chaos. This psychological space, both in the artist's mind and on the painted surface, is the opposite of a specific location. They are an amalgam of places past and present - vistas of a homemade paradise constantly in flux.



Detail of *Brutal Group*, 2022, oil on canvas, 178 x 145 cm



After three years of developing the language of painterly aesthetic survival methods on canvas, Couper has been awarded an artist residency with *Urban Art Projects* (UAP) in Brisbane, AU. He will be translating his large format paintings into sculptures, focusing on the interplay between materials and form. The oscillating compositions of nailed-together lumber, ropes, dripping eyeballs and billowing pipe smoke will be portrayed in the tangible forms of wood, aluminium, glass, bronze, gold-leaf and the architectural protection technique of *yakisugi*. In a similar way to Couper's make-shift constructions in his paintings, the sculptures implement various techniques with a variety of materials to realize the work in 3D. A central wooden block anchors the sculpture as a figure with vestiges added or protruding from the center mass. Blown and shaped glass depicts a rising, bulbous cloud of pipe smoke, while oversized bronze and aluminium nails pierce the form like a Saint Sebastian figure or an Nkisi figure from the Congo. The form ceases to be a make-shift shelter and morphs into an animated figure burdened by the appendages of its process.



*Study for a Sculpture #4*, 2023,  
oil on canvas, 34 x 26.5 cm



*Study for a Sculpture #6*, 2023, oil on  
cardboard, 28 x 20 cm



Matthew Couper (b. 1976) received his bachelor of fine art from The Quay School for the Arts in Whanganui, Aotearoa / NZ.

Recent solo exhibitions include *Isolation Paintings*, Millennium Art Gallery, Blenheim, NZ, *Isolation Paintings*, Aigantighe Art Museum, Timaru, NZ, *Isolation Paintings*, Tauranga Art Gallery, NZ (2022), *In Memory of Water*, La Luz de Jesus Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA (2019).

Selected group exhibitions include ALPHA: MAGMA Galleries Launch, (2023); *Every Artist*, City Gallery Wellington | Te Whare Toi, NZ; *A la Racine*, Biennale of Art and Culture d' Aix en-Provence, FR (2022); *Bunny Yeager and her Circle*, The Betsy, Miami, USA; *Excerpts: Works from the Collection*, Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art, Las Vegas, NV USA, (2022), *TANCHÉE RACINE*, Halle Saint Pierre, Paris, FR (2021).

Matthew's work is held in the following public collections: Aigantighe Art Museum, NZ, Barrick Museum of Art, USA, Bathurst Regional Art Gallery, AU, Sarjeant Gallery, NZ, The Real Art Roadshow Collection, NZ, and the National Gallery of Australia, AU. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, FR, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, NZ & IT. Matthew lives and works in the Mojave Desert USA.



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