A Singapore *Debut*

Western Australian artist LAUREN WILHELM has a distinct visual language that is instantly recognisable – melancholic, wide-eyed subjects that often appear alongside horses, birds or other animals.

Lauren says she draws inspiration from history, classical portraiture and the world around her. She's fascinated by the emotions and "overlooked narratives" of everyday life, and often juxtaposes classical imagery with contemporary suburban elements, creating works that feel both timeless and familiar.

With more than twenty solo exhibitions under her belt, from Australia to Europe and the US, this month Lauren arrives in Singapore for her Asian debut at REDSEA Gallery.

Tell us a little about your background and how you first discovered your passion for painting.
As a child, I was always drawing and painting. It was inevitable that I would do it as a career in some form, thanks to supportive (and maybe naive) parents. I started art school in my late teens but realised I needed life experience to explore ideas theoretically, as practical skills weren't really what the school was offering. So, I went to university to study graphic design. It was a worthwhile career, and it taught me a lot along the way. When I started painting again, composition and colour theory was still at the front of my mind.

Who or what has influenced your artistic development?
I won a scholarship to study in Budapest, Hungary for a year and, that was hugely impactful – the beautiful old art school with its soaring studios and marble staircases. I've always been interested in the past – even just everyday histories that haven't been documented and, of course studying in Eastern Europe was a big inspiration.

You work primarily with oil on Italian linen. What draws you to these materials?
I love smooth surfaces to paint on – wood panels and even aluminium. So, I adore this particular linen, which although expensive, has just the right amount of give and almost non-existent texture. My paint will create the texture, sometimes very heavily, but I like the choice to have a slick surface.

Can you walk us through your creative process – from the initial spark of an idea to the finished painting?
My process normally starts with an idea of colours, generally just the right two colours together will inspire me no end. When planning a painting, I start with the feeling I want to convey; strangely enough, the actual imagery comes last. My better paintings are the ones where I hold the feel I want in the piece, or better still I feel the mood I want, and it all comes together. I don't often plan a painting – I just draw straight onto the linen, so you could say that I work more intuitively.

Melancholy is a sweet, deep feeling and most of my paintings try to capture that elusive emotion, a longing for something that may or may not have ever existed.



Your paintings often feature animals alongside quiet, contemplative figures. What draws you to these recurring subjects?
Birds and animals are featured strongly in my work. I use them as a motif to remind us that we're all earthlings, all as important as each other. I like to draw attention to hubris in a gentle way, the arrogance of humanity – and the creatures, small or large, are as important as the central human figure.

This is your first solo exhibition in Asia. How does it feel presenting your work to Singapore audiences?
I've exhibited around Australia, New York, Barcelona and Italy several times but this is my first exhibition in Asia and I'm incredibly excited. I feel honoured to work alongside the wonderful REDSEA Gallery.

Tell us about the new body of work you've created for this exhibition.
My new works are a response to my frame of mind in the past year. I tend to not try to fit myself into a theme but rather work spontaneously and organically depending on the time and my preoccupations. I find most of this work a bit lighter, more colourful and maybe a bit more optimistic than the work I've done in previous years. I'm influenced by my surroundings – 35 acres of nature, trees and wide open spaces are often featured in my work.

How do you hope viewers and collectors connect with your work?
I hope they find a sense of wistfulness or pensive reflection in my work. I invite the viewer to consider the fragile relationship between humanity, memory and the natural world, and to come up with their own unique and personal interpretations.





What does a typical day in your studio look like?
I have a large studio set in beautiful bushland on our property, surrounded by wild birds and even some resident kangaroos. I start work at about 9am after feeding all the pets, put on some atmospheric music and start painting! I often lose track of time when I'm working on a piece or two and if I get interrupted it feels like waking out of a deep sleep, so I aim for few distractions.

When I'm not in the studio, I'm generally working on the property, spending time with my horses or my large aviary of rescue parrots, which are always entertaining.

What challenges have you faced in your career as an artist, and what have they taught you?
I suppose the most challenging part of my creative career has been finding a good balance between all aspects of life. When I'm really inspired, I just want to be in the studio 24/7, and it's often difficult to rip myself away to start other tasks that need to be done. Luckily, I have a very supportive partner who indulges me long periods immersed in the studio.

Is there a philosophy or guiding principle that has shaped both your life and your artistic practice?
My life philosophy is one of peace, which I think you can feel in my works: still contemplation, and doing no harm to others or the environment around me. I do believe that happiness lies in the most simple appreciation of nature, our connection to it and fellow humans. I'm very grateful to have the opportunity to create, and to have viewers rest their eyes on a still scene for a few moments in this busy world. EL

Lauren Wilhelm's first solo exhibition with REDSEA Gallery opens this month. You can register your interest at info@redseagallery.com or 6732 6711.
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