

An abstract painting featuring a rich palette of colors including deep blue, magenta, red, yellow, and orange. The texture is highly visible, with thick brushstrokes and areas of impasto. The composition is layered, with some colors appearing more prominent than others, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall effect is one of intense energy and emotional resonance.

# AFTER EUREKA: The Studies for Manifestation

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**ANTHONY WHITE**

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**EUREKA CENTRE BALLARAT**

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21 September 2024 - 2 March 2025

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# THE ART OF DISSENT

Paris-based Australian artist Anthony White's exhibition, *AFTER EUREKA: The Studies for Manifestation*, presents a compelling exposition of the painterly gesture as a form of dissent. These ten intimate studies for *Manifestation*, a body of work first exhibited in 2023, are an outcome of a National Library of Australia 2020 Creative Arts Fellowship. These high key coloured paintings have their genesis in White's research into Sidney Nolan's 1966 mural of the 1854 Eureka Stockade and represent a complex dialogue across time and place and between representation and abstraction. Expanding beyond this foundation, these paintings, like Nolan's mural itself, contain contradictory elements and unresolved tensions, underpinned by the artist's own deliberations about the role of the artist and the function of art in an increasingly divided world.

While undertaking his fellowship in Canberra, White spent many hours at the library working through Nolan's papers, forging a tangible connection to his art and life. He also visited Nolan's mural at its current home at the Australian National University's Kambri Cultural Centre. These resulting paintings build on White's well-established non-representational visual language yet are pointedly informed by Nolan's mural and the story of the Eureka Stockade. On his return to France, White's thinking about Nolan's art, Eureka's radical lineage, and the responsibility of art in divisive times, intensified during a period of widespread public protests and pandemic lockdowns. In the studio, these factors converged in the creation of this deeply personal series of paintings.

To appreciate White's body of work, its provenience needs to be traced, beginning with Nolan's Eureka Stockade mural. Revisiting a subject he first explored in the late 1940s, Nolan's mural was a spatial escalation of his well-established evocation of heroic, masculine colonial Australian folklore. Painted on copper panels, and originally designed for the foyer of the Reserve Bank of Australia in Melbourne, Nolan chose to depict a pivotal moment in Australian history - the attack by government forces on protesting miners in the Eureka Stockade on 3 December 1854. The mural depicts a battle scene that challenges the tenants of history painting. It does not glorify a heroic leader or explicate the righteousness of a cause, but instead establishes, as was a characteristic of Nolan's art, an ambiguous tension between veneration and iconoclasm.

Seemingly floating on the mural's picture plane, Nolan placed prominent images of men and horses, in battle and in retreat, a carriage and tents and buildings ablaze. Simultaneously corporeal and other-worldly, these figures and forms dominate the foreground, serving a didactic function. Informed by Raffaello Carboni's first hand account of the Eureka Stockade, Nolan's wraithlike figurative elements appear imprecisely in this non-linear composite scene, as if unreliably recounted, or perhaps hurriedly sketched by an eyewitness caught up in the confusion of the affray. Instead of Nolan's familiar heroic mark-making, the figurative elements are rigidly outlined in white enamel paint, contrasting starkly against the warm copper panelled background of smoky haze and roiling red plume.

Nolan's mural comprises a representational retelling of the Eureka battle in the foreground, and a loose suggestion of fire and smoke in the background. The background evokes passion, emotion and fervour and can be interpreted as a metaphorical 'incendiary'<sup>1</sup> spark of rebellion, alongside more specific historical references to fire – the burning of the Eureka Hotel, the miners burning their licenses, smoke and gunfire during the rebellion, etc. However, once isolated from the foreground, these background elements can also be appreciated within the purview of abstract art. Nolan establishes a tension between figuration and abstraction in his depiction of fire and smoke, bringing dynamism to a composition otherwise dominated by motionlessness protagonists. His treatment of fire and smoke is not especially pictorial, but instead represents the inner world of emotions and the collective desire for rebellion.

White's *AFTER EUREKA* paintings feature sweeping, interleaved brushstrokes and a deft interplay of colour. It is intriguing to see how he has reconciled his fascination with Nolan, a singular painter known for boldly reimagining and centring historical narratives in art, while advancing his own distinctive non-representational voice. He precisely points to the key elements that informed his project. ***'I've taken parts of the mural namely the background, billowing smoke, and the fire which destroyed the Eureka Hotel as the climax point of the clash. The mural has been fabricated on copper panels and I've deliberately focussed on the warmer tones and explosive energy of destruction of the hotel for the exhibition'***<sup>2</sup> he said.

1 'The Bank and Sidney Nolan', Reserve Bank of Australia website: <https://museum.rba.gov.au/exhibitions/sidney-nolan/>, retrieved 01/10/2024 – This unattributed essay states, "the mural...depicts scenes of frantic skirmishes, with the medium of enamel on copper invoking their volatile, incendiary quality".

2 Email: Anthony Camm to Anthony White, 18/08/2024.

Art historian Pepe Karmel connects twentieth century non-geometric abstraction's lineage to historical examples of European representational painting. He shows how artists endeavoured to capture the energy and movement of environmental phenomena, such as waves, clouds, gusts and vortexes, to evoke the divine and to symbolise an emotional inner life. This perspective can inform our thinking about Nolan's depiction of fire and smoke and White's subsequent response through an abstract idiom. Karmel wrote that the *'...abstract vortical landscape, which had effectively gone into hibernation after 1960, enjoyed a revival in the 1990s and 2000s'*.<sup>3</sup> He continued stating, *'...the abstract image of a world in perpetual motion acquired new relevance in the 1990s as globalization transformed life...'*<sup>4</sup> To position this shift in contemporary abstraction he highlights the work of Ethiopian-American painter Julie Mehretu, describing her abstract landscapes as *'wrenching dislocations of globalization'*.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, he locates Mehretu and her ilk at the vanguard of a reimagining of abstraction that honours and revives its connection to representation and subjectivity. White steadfastly falls into this camp.

Those who identify as abstract artists often readily disavow the once dominant force of non-objective art with its claims of universality, its preoccupation with medium specificity and its zeal for purity. Still, it is not uncommon for abstract artists to lament the creeping in of shapes and forms in their own art that are either inadvertently or subconsciously representational. While some artists efficiently redact these elements, others are less decisive. While White's response to Nolan's mural did require an arraignment of its figurative aspects, it would be reductive to assume a strict dismissal of figuration. He writes, *'I haven't included any figurative references at all in the works on paper but in the paintings for Manifestation, I initially started with some figurative references, including an image of a colonial trooper being shot by a rioting miner and collapsing on the ground, arms flung in the air. Later through the process this figure was buried under a strata of paint, but the idea remains for a larger painting later on'*.<sup>6</sup>

White situates the act of making art as a powerful 'manifestation'<sup>7</sup> of radical action. He was inspired by Nolan's mural, and then sought a deeper understanding of Eureka by reading Carboni's account as well as recent historical research. But, as always, overarching this project

is the enduring significance to White of the 'painterly gesture as a form of dissent'.<sup>8</sup> Transcending historical, cultural and geographic specificity, this conceptual anchor guides his practice across disparate contexts. As he witnessed the rise in global political tyranny, and new protest movements unleashing historical grievances, the events of Eureka gained more currency and inspired in him a sense of urgency concerning the need for collective action.

Back in France, the Eureka Stockade began to transcend its historical moment in White's imagination, revealing itself in the world around him. Eureka was always a global story of universal struggle where people resolved, in the words of Eureka rebel leader, Peter Lalor, *'to stand truly by each other, and fight to defend our rights and liberties'*.<sup>9</sup> Reflecting on the many possibilities Eureka opened up for him, White said, *'...it tied both into early Australia's colonial history of democracy and extremely current contemporary events. Especially the rise of the autocratic leader such as Trump and Bolsonaro, but also as a reference point to look at the resurgence of fascism'*.<sup>10</sup>

It's strange how things often converge unexpectedly in life. What began for White as a project focussed on Nolan's archives, evolved into a complex reckoning with his country of birth, Australia, and his home country, France. He began his research in Australia at the start of pandemic lockdowns and returned to France to complete the resulting paintings during uncertain times. With Nolan's mural as pictorial inspiration, and Eureka as a model for radical action, his practice was emotionally charged by the reality of an increasingly fractured world. He viewed at close hand protests from across the ideological spectrum, the deterioration of social cohesion and the rise of fascism. It felt as if the world was breaking apart, yet at other times as if it was coming back together. The artist's touch is embedded in these paintings that contains the fury, anguish and grief, as well as the beauty, optimism and hope of those times. These paintings don't offer an ideology to embrace, or a plan for the future, instead they honour and advance the long tradition of people taking action and making their mark, in art as in life.

**Anthony Camm**  
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3 Karmel, Pepe, 'Abstract Art: A Global History', Thames & Hudson, New York, USA, 2020, page 113.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Email: Anthony Camm to Anthony White, 18/08/2024.

7 Manifestation is a word used in France to describe protests and demonstrations that advocate for social or political change. Manifestation was chosen by Anthony White as the name of his exhibition presented at Lennox St. Gallery, Richmond, Victoria, Australia, 12-30 July 2023.

8 Hill, Peter, 'To the Barricades', essay published by Lennox St. Gallery to mark Anthony White's Manifestation exhibition, 12-30 July 2023.

9 Peter Lalor's Bakery Hill speech in Carboni, Raffaello, 'The Eureka Stockade', Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1993, page 68.

10 Email: op. cit. 18/08/2024.





Anthony White, 'After Eureka 3012311' 2023, synthetic polymer paint on Arches 300gsm paper, 42 x 29.5cm,  
Photo: Carlo Zeccola.





Anthony White, *'After Eureka 3012303'* 2023, synthetic polymer paint on Arches 300gsm paper, 42 x 29.5cm,  
Photo: Carlo Zeccola.

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Cover image: Anthony White, *'After Eureka 3012312'* 2023 (detail),  
synthetic polymer paint on Arches 300gsm paper, 42 x 29.5cm,  
Photo: Carlo Zeccola.

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Anthony White is represented by Lennox St. Gallery [lennoxst.gallery](http://lennoxst.gallery)



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