

# A street tree named desire.

A selection of recent oil paintings by Simone Annis



# Simone Annis

Simone is an artist who has run an e-bike business from home for the past 16 years while raising three children and loves most things about living in the “People’s Republic of O’Connor” (Inner North, Canberra).

Simone graduated with an MBA (Strategic Operations Management) from Charles Stuart University a long time ago and a BA in Visual Arts (Painting) from the Australian National University a very, very, long, long time ago.

Being a little crazy, Simone is currently doing a Grad Dip in nothing related to previous areas of study.

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# About the exhibition

This exhibition includes a selection of recent paintings based on street trees and the related 'desire lines' theme.

The landscape, and elements within the landscape, such as trees, rivers, buildings, roads, and pathways, tells us a story of place and belonging, and by inference, of who we, collectively, are.

In this exhibition I am exploring the suburban landscape that I (and others) inhabit daily, as this personalises the above concept. Through looking for beauty in everyday urban green spaces, I get a sense of myself that also affirms who I am. Like the trees, I've laid down roots. Research also confirms that time spent with trees help us stay healthier and happier. Trees also help to mitigate the impacts of global warming.

In urban and transport planning 'desire lines' refer to the unofficial paths that collective feet make through the landscape over time. These well-trodden paths are both subversive, being illicit, and conversely, the path of least resistance. Desire Lines are paths that form themselves and are evidence of both humanity and the impact of humans in the environment. Desire lines are often found under street trees, as we naturally gravitate to walking under the trees.

Street trees ground us in a place but go unnoticed as backdrops to most people's lives and experiences. Fashions change: houses go up, get renovated and pulled down but, for the most part, the trees stay the same and grow old more gracefully. Evergreen. Fashion in landscape architecture has also changed: from the understory of respectability and colonisation implied by the oaks, elms and conifers of the leafy inner city to the smattering of pocket parks containing majestic remnant gumtrees surrounded by native grasses in the new outer suburbs. Some trees, like the people, are in place, out of place. Other trees remind us that, the landscape (and indigenous culture) always was and always will be.





# Paperbarks, Horseshoe Bay

Mixed media: collage (tissue and craft paper), oil paint  
and oil stick on canvas

110cm x 70cm x 4cm

\$1000

My partner and I had a short stay on Magnetic Island late last year. We've been there once before, years ago, when we had three kids under four. This time, the trip wasn't so hectic as it was just the two of us.

We stayed in Horseshoe Bay and went past these beautiful paperbarks a couple of times each day: at the start of a run in the early morning light; on the way to and from the bus stop during the day, and on our way to the pub or cafe for dinner. No matter what the time of day, these trees always looked glorious, abundant and strong.





# Street Gum

Mixed media (acrylic, oil sticks and paint) on canvas  
75cm x 100cm x 4cm  
\$800

On the bike path near McArthur Avenue, in O'Connor, there is a row of majestic old gum trees. I feel like these trees have seen a lot over the years. I relate to them as old friends and say hello every time I go past.

The cockies sit in the upper branches and screech at me loudly as I go past underneath. I don't know what they are saying but imagine it to be quite rude and unflattering. Such larrikins, those birds.





# Magnetic Island Study

Mixed media (acrylic and oil paint) on canvas  
53cm x 40cm x 4cm  
\$400

While not actually a painting of a street tree, I thought I would include this one in the exhibition as the pine trees are so particular to the sense of place: Magnetic Island, Queensland. Study for larger painting that I never did.

I was interested in the contrasting texture and colours of the various elements: trees, rocks, sand, ocean and sky. And who doesn't love a beach painting masquerading as a tree painting?





# Wetlands

Mixed media (acrylic and oil paint) on canvas  
30cm x 30cm x 2.5 cm  
\$200

This was a storm water drain. It is now a beautiful little urban oasis next to the O'Connor shops.

I walk my dogs (on leads) around here frequently and get hissed at by the mother duck looking after her ducklings.





# Wetlands two

Mixed media (acrylic and oil paint) on canvas  
30cm x 30cm x 2.5 cm  
\$200

This was a storm water drain. It is now a beautiful little urban oasis next to the shops.

I walk my dogs (on leads) around here frequently and get hissed at by the mother duck looking after her ducklings.





# Haig Park, West

Oil paint on canvas

30cm x 30cm x 2.5cm

\$220

I like Haig Park, especially this end, between the Bowlo and the Childcare Centre (which all my kids went too). Apparently, many people don't like Haig Park. I've been told by a few people that it's not an inviting park. I disagree, it's a welcome, shady, green band of nothing much, next to the city. Great for a dog walk or an easy run up and back.

Like many other places in the Inner North of Canberra, Haig Park West features prominently in the history of me.

For a while I lived opposite it. First time I lost my car keys was in Haig Park. Also, the first time my wallet was stolen was in Haig Park. Admittedly, the park can be a bit creepy after dark.





# Alt

Mixed media (acrylic and oil paint) on canvas  
53cm x 24cm x 4cm  
\$400

Alt Crescent is an older street in the inner north of Canberra. I like the feel of the street and the whimsical shape of the trees. It's a strange combination and very particular to that place. Being conifers and not native to Australia, the trees, like many of us, are in place, out of place.

I am like the trees, rooted, in a good way. I'm grounded by location and my own sense of self, place and history.





## Alt, two

Mixed media (acrylic and oil paint) on canvas

91cm x 61cm x 4cm

\$450

Street trees on Alt Crescent. A strange little, but somewhat, iconic place in the history of me as I went to nearby Campbell High.

One day, mid 1980's, the 15-year-old 'trouble-makers' mowed AC/DC into the grass on the hill next to the quadrangle. I thought, at the time, that it was the most subversive and creative thing I had ever seen. While I was suitably impressed, I remained aloof. They were after all 'headbangers'.

In homage to the headbangers, I felt the need to include some cursive forms in the brushwork in this painting, but not in a way that could be read. I wanted the writing to look like words that could almost be mown into the grass or written in the clouds and reflected onto the ground.





# River Gum, Quilpie

Mixed media (felt tip pen, acrylic and oil paint)  
on canvas

28cm x 28cm x 2.5cm

\$260 with frame

My father-in-law recently took himself off to outback Queensland. Knowing my interest in street trees, he would regularly send a picture of a tree from his early morning walks.

I find it interesting to paint from someone else's vision of a place that I've never seen. It's like looking through someone else's eyes. I guess it's something that we all do when we are watching a screen, but it's a different way for me of crafting a landscape.

Not surprisingly the palette is slightly different to the Canberra tree paintings.





# River Gum three

Mixed media (acrylic and oil paint) on canvas  
28cm x 28cm x 2.5cm  
\$260 with frame

Another painting of a river gum from somewhere in outback Queensland.

In this painting I was focusing on capturing the effect of that stark bright outback light on the objects. In the light, the muddy ochre river looks almost apricot, in contrast to the bright white and grey gum trees. The light also washes out the blue sky and pale green bush tones. If this painting was any brighter, you would have to wear sunglasses to look at it.





# Reid Eucalypts two

Mixed media (acrylic and oil paint) on canvas  
75cm x 100cm x 4cm  
\$800

This avenue of trees was planted near the Reid Tafe (before the building was there) in anticipation of a railway line being built into the centre of Canberra.

The line and the platform were never built, but the trees remain and are a beautiful little oasis between the Tafe and the City.





# Lyneham High

Oil paint on canvas

50cm x 39cm x 2.5cm

\$400

The last of my three children who all went to this school is now in Year 10. It hasn't been a very inspiring educational experience for them individually, or our family collectively, but it hasn't been that bad either.

On the many times I've found myself walking under the trees to the front office to collect a broken or sick child, drop off a forgotten swimming bag, or overdue permission note, I've been grateful for the trees that sit between the school and the street. It makes the place look less institutional and calmer than it might otherwise.





# Early Spring, Black Mountain

Mixed media (acrylic and oil paint) on canvas

62cm x 74cm x 4cm

\$500

This painting is not of street trees, but from a place where I run or walk at least once a week: Black Mountain in Canberra.

In this painting, looking up towards the summit track, I was interested in the colours: the light Naples yellow of the early wattles; the delicate ochre pinkness of the rocks and the textures of the grass and trees in the distance. The blue metal (used normally on road surfaces) looks almost like water sitting on the surface of the earth. As a material for the track, it's a bit of an anomaly, and is only in that one spot, but the grey blue is a good contrast to the other colours in the painting.





# River Gum two

Mixed media (acrylic and oil paint) on canvas  
28cm x 28cm x 2.5cm  
\$200

Another painting of a river gum from somewhere either in Queensland or perhaps near Albury in NSW.

I had people sending me photos from their morning walks in both places.





# Cork oaks

Mixed media (oil stick & oil paint) on canvas board  
51cm x 41cm x .5cm  
\$150

The cork oaks were planted in 1917. At the time, cork was in high demand. No longer. Those town planners were thinking ahead as it takes 25 years before you can harvest the bark for the first time.

Because of the significance of the bark, I thought that's what I should attempt to paint. Bark detail.

The dappled light through the branches creates a nice ambience and it's always a lovely spot to ride through and I often thank those far-sighted town planners as I ride past.



# City Hill two

Mixed media (acrylic and oil paint) on canvas

101cm x 75cm x 2.5cm

\$750



Canberra is famous for roundabouts. One of many such traffic calming devices is City Hill which now sits between the City Centre and the road to Commonwealth Avenue Bridge which crosses Lake Burley Griffin. I've often admired the whimsical looking trees as I've whizzed by in my car.

Reading in a local paper about the rabbit plague currently occurring on City Hill reminded me that it was about time I jumped on my bike, rode over and took some photos with the intention of finding inspiration for a painting.

I had been there once previously as a teenager looking for a public space to hangout in. Judging from the empty wine cask and remnant 'Hard Solo' cans strewn around park benches 40 years later, teens are still using City Hill with the same illicit intention as I had then.

It's a very odd place, difficult to get to or from without getting run over (as the rabbits have discovered). The trees look like they belong to another era and place. However, these conifers are well shaped if a little old and brittle. At the base of most trees are rabbit diggings and burrows. The surface of the ground is covered with layers of dried-up droppings and yellowing stubble eaten down to the roots. It is dusty and rather uninviting. No wonder teens still go there, no one with a better option for outdoor entertainment would choose it as a location for anything.

I've painted this image on a reused canvas that I got from the Green Shed. I've left some of the patterned surface visible as I liked the idea that there's a different history on which another one has been layered.





## City Hill three

Mixed media (acrylic and oil paint) on canvas  
90cm x 60cm x 4cm  
\$450

The view from City Hill towards Parliament House. It's not a great view, particularly now when most of the view is obscured by hazard fencing, and bits of light rail construction. But at a distance, in the right light, it has a certain 'je ne sais quoi'.





# Geraldton street trees

Mixed media (acrylic and oil paint) on canvas board  
51cm x 41cm x .5cm  
\$150

I like it when you can see the weather in the trees. It makes everything feel more dramatic. I am imagining that these trees were very wind-swept. I could be wrong, as I've never been to Geraldton.\*

My partner, Kim, goes there infrequently for work. He likes to send me photos of the local attractions such as wind-swept street trees.

\*After reading this, Kim confirms that Geraldton is in fact a very windy place, favoured by kite surfers and offshore windfarm investors.





# Conifering with you two

Oil on Canvas  
50cm x 40cm x 4cm  
\$430 with frame

The second of two paintings of conifers outside the Ainslie IGA. Both unfortunately and fortunately I sold the other painting to an old friend before this show.

This painting reminds me of a different older version of Canberra and a younger version of myself.





# Wattle, that be three?

Mixed media (acrylic, oil stick and paint) on canvas

100cm x 100cm x 4cm

\$1000

Every year towards the end of winter I feel much joy in the vibrancy of the golden yellow tones that flowering wattle trees bring to the streets around me.

Wattles remind me that Spring is just around the corner. In response, every year, I do at least one wattle painting in homage to this quintessentially Australian tree.

I think of these Wattle paintings as a personal metaphor for purposely choosing to look for the light and beauty in my life, even if everything else seems gloomy and tragic.





# Double Ainslie

Mixed media (acrylic and oil paint, oil crayon and oil stick) on canvas

75cm x 100cm x 4cm

\$800

A running friend of mine recently posted a run on Strava. Her run was okay, but what really struck me was the colours in one of her early morning photos from the run. Fortunately, she didn't mind me using her photo as a reference (thanks Kerren).

Why I liked her photo was that it captured what another running acquaintance of mine describes as the 'golden light' of that time and place.

I love the way she always says it. She could be, like me, focusing on the pain of having just run up the hill, but instead she's focusing on that moment and the beauty of the day. Just as I start to think it, "There's that golden light again," she'll say.





# Beyond the Cotter River

Mixed media (collage, oil stick and oil paint) on canvas  
100cm x 75cm x 4cm  
\$800

There's a lot of fire damage beyond the Cotter River, but it's still beautiful in a remote, out of the way, kind of way.

While these trees are not street trees, I came across suburbia in the form of a kebab wrap on this walk, so I decided to embed it as the collage element of this painting.

My guess is that the kebab wrap is symbolic of the ever-present influence of people on the environment, but maybe I just liked the texture.





# Skeletal Trees

Mixed media (acrylic and oils) on canvas

75cm x 100cm x 4cm"

\$800

While not a street tree, I've included this painting as it fits the 'tree' aspect of the theme.

It's a great walk to Mount Gingera where there is a unique ecosystem. The landscape depicted in this painting initially looks quite beautiful: the colours are glorious and there's a vibrancy in the viridescent tones of regrowth; the granite rocks contrast so nicely with the tree branches in terms of form and texture.

However, clearly visible in this area is the significant devastation caused by the 2020 bushfires. The skeletal remains of the burnt trees are also a little disquieting, a reminder of that recent trauma as well as a signifier of climate change and our ever-present collective impact on the environment.





# End of the road

Mixed media (collage, oil stick and oil paint) on canvas  
100cm x 75cm x 4xm  
\$800

A recent painting not quite on the street tree theme, but I thought the painting deserved an outing anyway.

I've noticed that people have mixed reactions to caravans, specifically the idea of caravans. Many people love a caravan and associate a van with freedom, travel, wonderful childhood holidays and alike. Some people (like me) have the opposite reaction. I associate caravans with sardine cans, sketchy back blocks in the middle of nowhere, meth labs (thanks for that Breaking Bad) and unhappy childhood holidays (my sister has a disability and being packed into a caravan for a wet weekend made a complex family situation more so). To some a caravan is a dream come true, to others a symbol of lost dreams and more recently, lost homes and homelessness.

So when I came across these vans, in storage, in a paddock, at the end of a road, becoming part of nature, that's what I thought of. However, I tried to make my depiction of the vans more neutral, given that, as I said, some people would love to be out to pasture in a caravan.





# Near the Co-op

Mixed media (acrylic and oil paint, oil crayon and oil stick) on canvas

75cm x 100cm x 4cm

\$800

The park next to the Co-operative School is maintained by some very enthusiastic locals. One lady does most of the work. She's always out there, weeding, planting and watering and weeding, planting and watering.

I feel a little guilty that I can enjoy her efforts in the park and yet contribute nothing. I don't feel guilty enough to help. Bad I know, but I can at least acknowledge what she does. There, I've done it.

A dog walking friend recently posted a photo, publicly acknowledging all her hard work. The photo captured the light so beautifully, so I asked her permission to use the photo as a reference for this painting.





# Lyneham Motor Inn

Mixed media (acrylic and oil paint) on canvas  
120cm x 90cm x 4cm  
\$1000

The Lyneham Motor Inn is iconic in a disappearing 1970's Motel Inn kind of way, and I've been watching its decline since about then. I don't think it ever was a building with a heyday.

I think it might be low-cost student accommodation now. You might be disappointed if you arrived from overseas to study at the prestigious ANU and found yourself ensconced in the Lyneham Motor Inn. I imagine it's awful inside. Or maybe it's just peachy: chenille bedspreads in apricot, is what I'm picturing.

I keep expecting to turn around and find the Inn suddenly replaced by another block of flats.

In the middle of the day, the shaped conifers out the front look spectacular against the pink of the building and I like the addition of the graffiti to the side wall.

In homage to the fading glory of both the Motor Inn and the picture postcard, this painting was an experiment in highly saturated techno-colour.