



HOW I WORK

Adam Leng

In his dynamic art, the young Queensland painter maps out the graphic landscapes of his own subconscious, tracing ancestral lines and honouring the ties that bind



When Adam Leng picks up a brush and starts painting, he's not just creating art. He's also looking inside himself and exploring how culture, family history and personal identity all fit together.

Painting is a relatively new pursuit for the young artist, who began working with acrylic paints on cotton and linen in early 2022. Nevertheless, he has always been a creator of art. "Before painting, I wrote a lot of music and dabbled in all sorts of multimedia forms," he explains. "Art has always helped me to break down and unpack broader ideas. The reason I took up painting was to explore the personal effects of assimilation policies on my family line and, subsequently, on who I am today. Painting felt like a way for me to say less but speak to myself on a personal level."

Adam was born and raised on Yugambah land in Currumbin, Queensland, but he is not a Yugambah person. He creates his paintings out the back of Lazarus Film Lab at Currumbin Waters. In footage showing his creative process in action, all his brushstrokes appear certain and precise. Designs emerge quickly and have an innate momentum. In many works, squishy and puffy lines wiggle-waggle into bigger structures within structures. They're hypnotically graphic in nature and rich in tones that echo the colours of the bush and earth. In other pieces, new patterns and paths are complex and often surprising to follow



with the eye. A dead-straight line may begin its journey in a direct point-A-to-point-B manner, but then there will be waves further on, and curves, or perhaps even abrupt u-turns that change everything completely. The path ahead is never straightforward. The result is an entrancing visual presentation of a personal journey, a subconscious process of sorts – with abstract answers, or perhaps just more questions laid bare for the pondering. It all depends on perspective.

Rather than deciding where an artwork is ‘going’ in advance, Adam says he just lets his feelings and instincts guide the forms and colours that present themselves on the canvas. Each painting generates itself into existence through this process. “My works are never planned,” he says. “I use it [painting] as a meditative tool, so whatever comes out, comes out.”

While his art-making is completely open and fluid, Adam’s foundational creative sentiment is direct and rock solid. “The three lines in my works represent the individual, country and the ancestors, always bound. My art is an expression of the layers that make up the whole – and they’re a reminder to myself of all the strong Kooris in my family, and that I wouldn’t be here without them.”

Indigenous culture and personal identity are clearly central to his art, however Adam’s technique and style inspirations are a little harder to pin down. “I’m not too sure where I got the idea

really,” says Adam, when considering his own way of making art. “I grew up really liking [artist] Keith Haring and all of the art that came out of graffiti culture. Graphic and bold. So I think that would’ve influenced me on some level.”

Adam says he doesn’t really think about what his work will or won’t ‘say’ when it’s hanging on a gallery wall. And he certainly never lets a sense of external messaging creep in and influence his creative methods or the final form of a painting. For him, the act of painting is primarily a personal pursuit, a means of sense-making and self-expression, fuelled by the desire to honour familial connections and understand the deeper context in which they echo through his life. “I try to keep my focus on creating as it makes me feel connected to my ancestors,” he says. “But I would hope that it gives people a chance to reflect on who they are and where they come from.”

Represented by HAKE House of Art in Dee Why, NSW, Adam’s first solo exhibition will be held there in June 2023. T-shirts and totes featuring his designs are sometimes available through Lazarus Film Lab at Currumbin Waters. The T-shirts are currently sold out, but Adam hopes to release more merchandise soon – when he gets around to it. [📍](#)

View works from Adam’s latest two series (Gumera and Intersection) at [hake.house](#), [@hake.house](#) and [@adam.leng](#). See his designs on T-shirts and tote bags at [lazaruslab.com.au](#)