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- 01 **Untitled figures, Mt Ruapehu, 2009**, oil on canvas, 180 x 140cm
- 02 **Kneeling figure, Mt Ruapehu, 2009**, oil on board, 67 x 150cm
- 03 **Field figure 1, study, 2009**, oil on board, 40 x 50cm
- 04 **Field figure 2, study, 2009**, oil on board, 40 x 50cm

STEVE LOPES

Steve Lopes is a painter and printmaker from Sydney. He has studied at The London Print Studio, The New York Art Students League and The College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales. Since 1996, Lopes has exhibited extensively with over fifteen solo exhibitions around Australia and in London. He has widely exhibited in selected group exhibitions including the AGNSW Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship, The Kedumba Invitational Drawing Award, The Metro 5 Art Prize and Doug Moran Portrait Prize. His work is held in numerous major public collections including The National Gallery of Australia.

What draws you to paint landscapes?

I try to deal with the figure and the landscape together. For me, it's about the relationship we have with our surrounds. The tension between the two both visually and metaphorically is what makes it interesting to tackle that subject.

What are your views on the currency of landscape painting in contemporary art?

Done well, it's very important. It difficult to constantly reinvent it, considering the legacy it brings with it, but artists still manage make it interesting and compelling.

What do you gain from being in the landscape?

When you place yourself in a location and commit to capturing something, then it becomes about reacting to the lighting, form and colours in a natural or instinctive way. In the landscape you're able to remove yourself from the equation, and let go. From nature I discover colour and lighting that I could never dream up myself.

Can you outline your process from plein air to final work?

Part of the joy of painting plein air is the uncertainty, the lack of control, and I try to maintain that in the final works. When painting outdoors, I try to cover the picture quickly first, keeping the paint watery, and then scumble into it, finding the form or shadows. Then I will add thicker spontaneous strokes and try not to go over them or alter them too much — I might work back into the paint with a shaper and push it around. I keep a diary/sketchbook and write down the colours I used for that area.

What materials did you find most useful on the trip?

I turned into a Liquin-aholic! This allowed for more translucent glazes and runny effects, which suited the New Zealand landscape. For practical reasons, I needed the work to dry quickly — unlike with harsh solvents, the colour still held its body and hue when dry. The landscape colour was muted at times and I stumbled upon the use of spectrum orange as an important device to provide high tones and lift the pitch of a painting.

How did you find the experience of working with a large group of painters?

To see someone's markedly different approach develop in front of you and compare it to your own, is an amazing learning experience and opens you up to other ways of working. Some of the artists



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absorbed the landscape very slowly, going for walks, researching, while others threw themselves gung-ho straight into the painting. I was in the gung-ho camp but by the end of the trip I found myself observing the terrain a lot more before committing paint to canvas.

What did you enjoy most from the trip overall?

The camaraderie of being amongst like-minded people who share the same artistic obsessions is an extremely validating experience. It makes you feel you're not the only crazy person out there who spends each waking hour thinking and doing art. ■

Steve Lopes is represented by Stella Downer Fine Art, Sydney and Dwyer Fine Art, Melbourne.
www.stelladownerfineart.com.au
www.dwyerfineart.com
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Exhibition
 'Sons of Los' 20 October – 23 November, 2009
 Stella Downer Fine Art, 2 Danks Street, Waterloo, NSW



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