



**SOPHIE
GANNON
GALLERY**

ELLA DUNN
SKIMMING STONES

26 SEPTEMBER - 14 OCTOBER
2023

SOPHIE GANNON GALLERY
2 Albert Street Richmond VIC 3121 Australia T +613 9421 0857
info@sophiegannongallery.com.au www.sophiegannongallery.com.au

ELLA DUNN

Skimming Stones

Local legend and personal reflection commingle to moody, painterly effect in Melbourne artist Ella Dunn's new exhibition of oils on canvas, *Skimming Stones*.

"This body of work was ignited by listening to a podcast about Margaret Clement, aka Gippsland's 'Lady of the Swamp,'" says Dunn, who graduated from VCA with a first-class honours degree in drawing and printmaking in 2017.

Rendered in a muted, earthy palette of green, brown, orange, black and white, the 12 paintings imagine scenes from the eccentric life and unsolved disappearance of the riches-to-rags society heiress, who, along with her sister Jeanie, resided in a decaying mansion, Tullaree, surrounded by waist-deep swamp at Tarwin Lower in Gippsland.

Following Jeanie's death in 1950, the squalor of their living conditions became apparent and Margaret gained a degree of notoriety as the 'Lady of the Swamp'. "She would traipse through the swamp carrying her shopping bags," says Dunn. Margaret vanished in 1952, sparking a media frenzy and much speculation in the community. According to the Australian Dictionary of Biography, she was declared legally dead in 1954, and an inquest in 1980 returned an open verdict. To this day, her remains have never been found.

"I was drawn to this woman who spent the later part of her life as a recluse, who had no children of her own, and who lived in a way that is not the expected 'norm' for a woman at the time," muses Dunn.

"But my work is always about more than one thing, so I began to put myself into the story as well. I was thinking about the isolation and loneliness that comes with being an artist, how you separate yourself from friends and family to make art alone. I often like to blur the line between my own personal experiences and a fictional or partly obscured narrative."

While careful not to over-research, Dunn did allow herself a peek at newspaper photographs of Margaret, the mansion, the surrounding swamp, and detectives searching it following her disappearance. "But I didn't look at too many images and I haven't been to Tullaree because I wanted my imagination to make up its own story."

The paintings were also nourished by poetry Dunn was reading at the time, including *Her Kind* by Anne Sexton, "which is about women being perceived as witches", as well as *Mirror* by Sylvia Plath, "in which the poem's narrator is a mirror", she says. "They've all fed into and informed this body of work."

Dunn tends to work "quite quickly" on multiple paintings simultaneously. "I bounce between them, and between painting and drawing, which remains a key part of my practice. I'm always filling up my studio walls with texts and drawings as a way to generate ideas." She creates her paintings through the application of many thin layers of oil pigment diluted with various glaze mediums. "Sometimes I sand back the layers or scrub them back – it's very intuitive. I like to test out new mediums and ways of doing things," she says.

Dunn paints in a loose and lyrical manner, leaning in to atmosphere and visual ambiguity. "I don't like images that are too fixed. I'm reminded of something the American painter Amy Sillman once said: 'Art is for perplexing you, so that everything is maybe something else.'"

Tony Magnusson
September 2023



Don't stand too close to the window?, 2023
oil on canvas
150 x 120 cm
\$4,200 incl. GST



Holding on, 2023
oil on canvas
120 x 100 cm
\$3,800 incl. GST



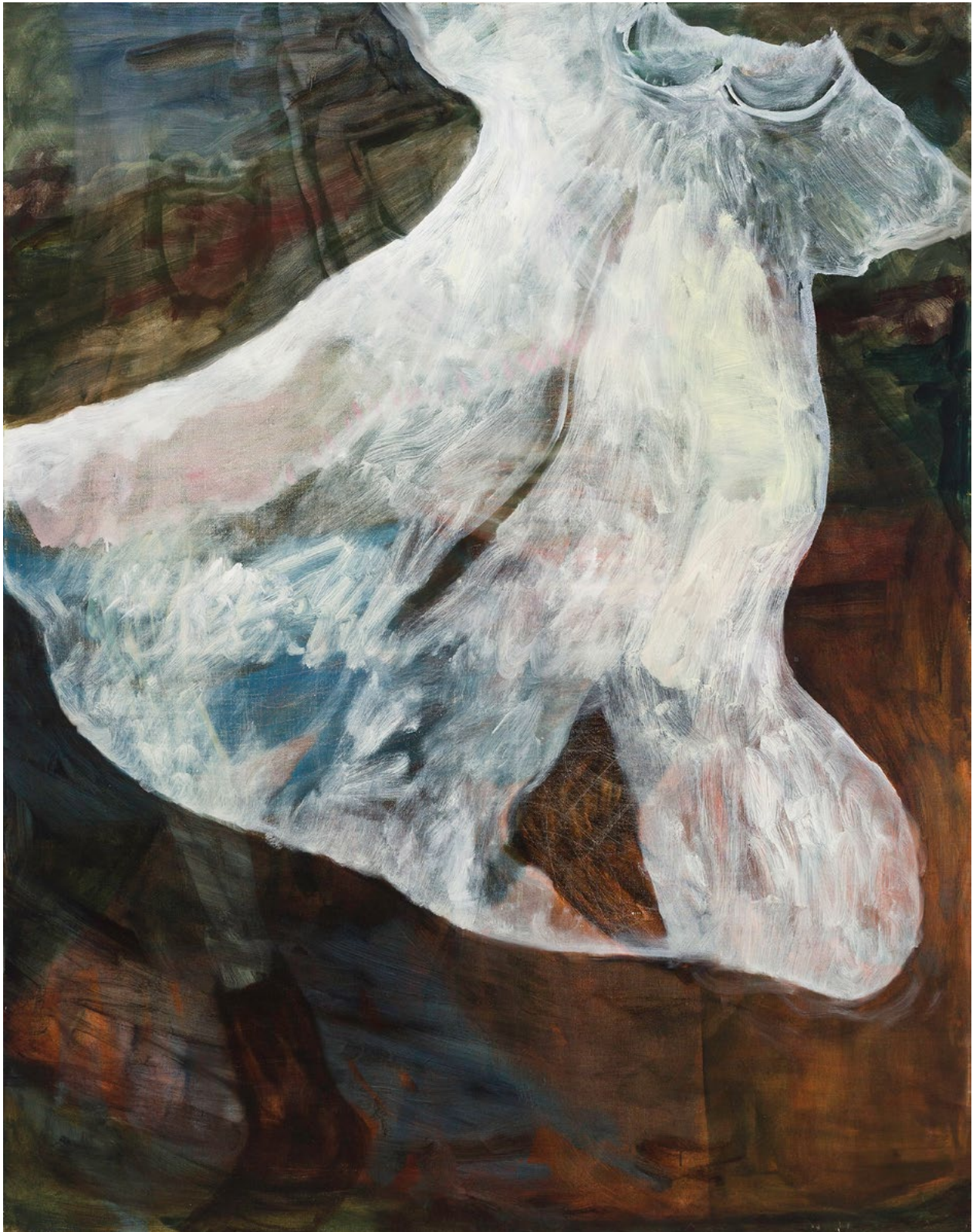
I found you or did you find me?, 2023
oil on canvas
150 x 120 cm
\$4,200 incl. GST



Across the way, 2023
oil on canvas
76.5 x 71.5 cm
\$2,000 incl. GST



I have been her kind, 2022
oil on canvas
120 x 100 cm
\$3,800 incl. GST



Night dress, 2022
oil on canvas
120 x 100 cm
\$3,800 incl. GST



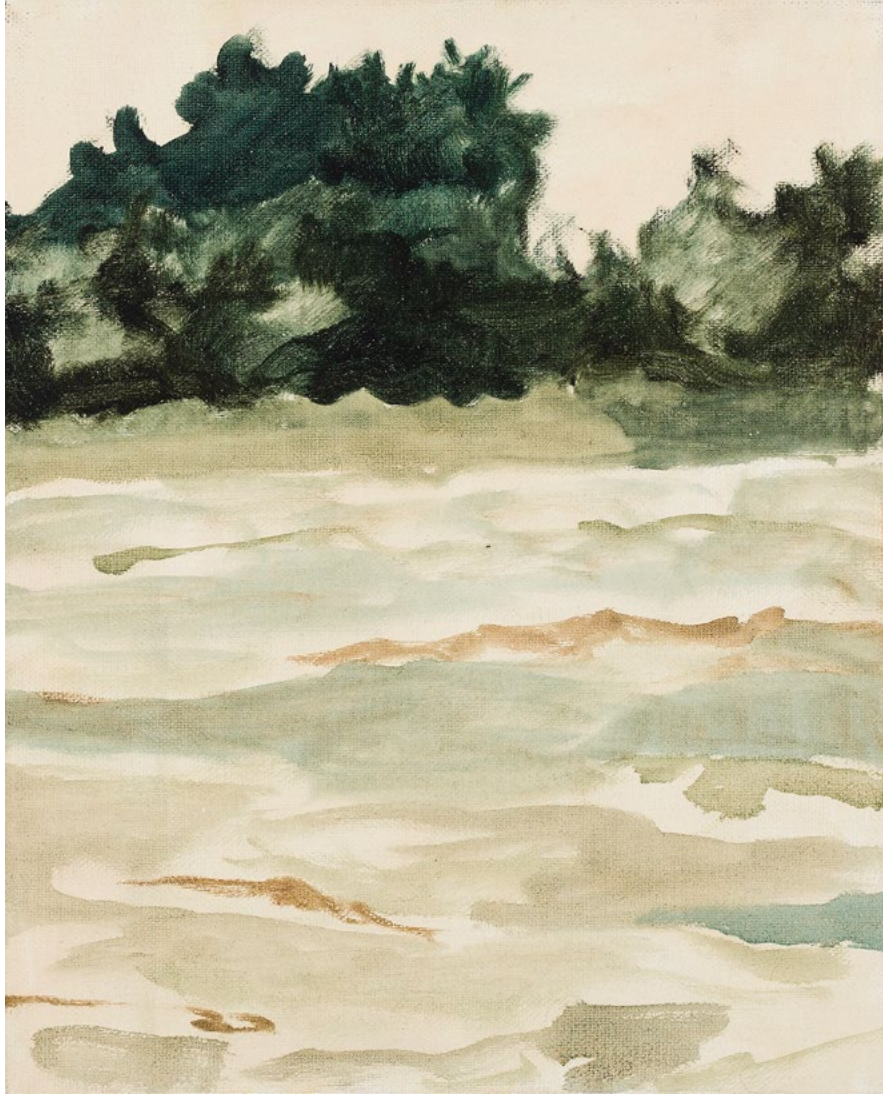
Wading through, 2023
oil on canvas
41 x 31 cm
\$1,150 incl. GST



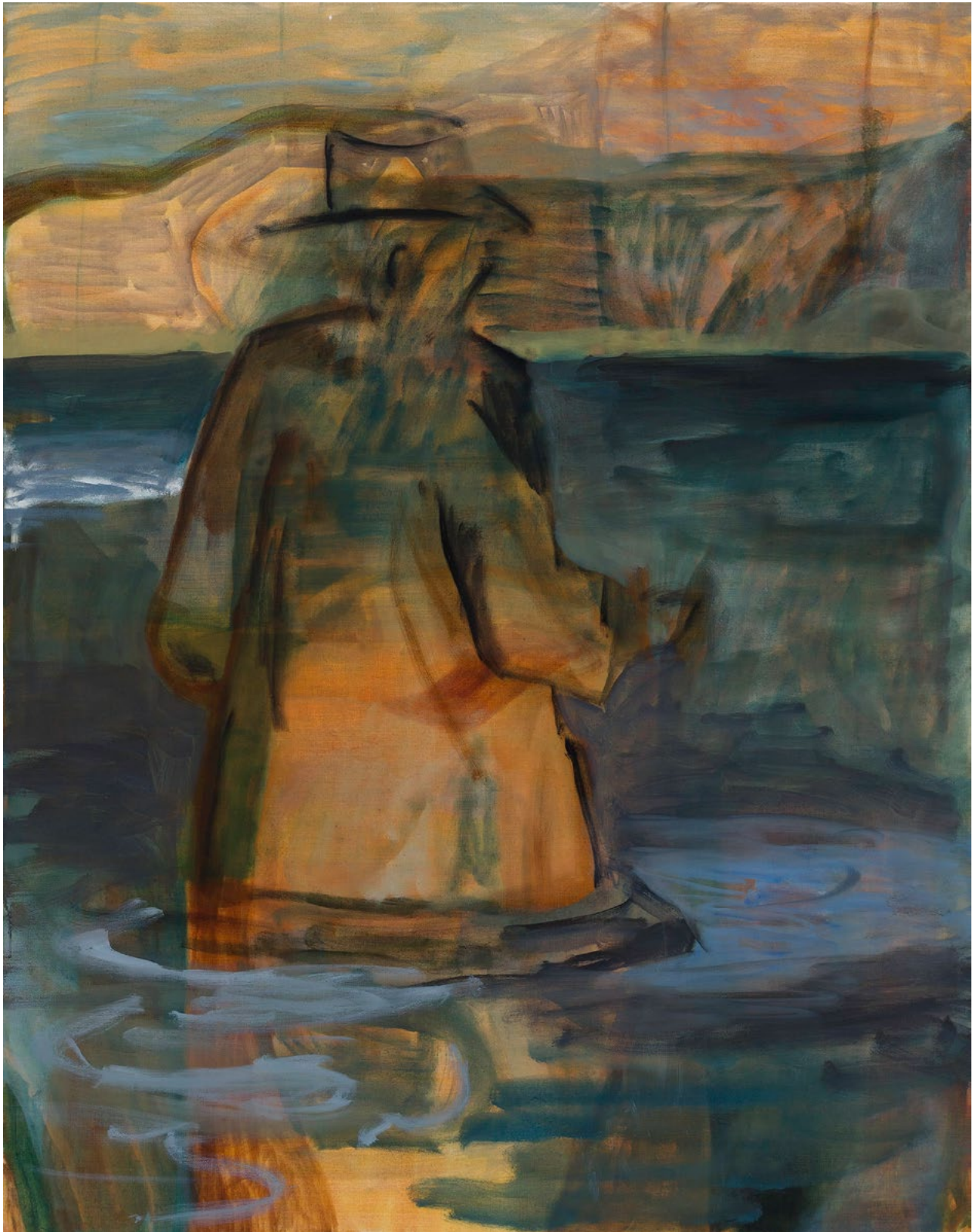
The long drive, 2023
oil on canvas
120 x 100 cm
\$3,800 incl. GST



It was a full moon, 2023
oil on canvas
120 x 100 cm
\$3,800 incl. GST



Murky waters, 2023
oil on canvas
41 x 31 cm
\$1,150 incl. GST



The search, 2023
oil on canvas
120 x 100 cm
\$3,800 incl. GST



The night I saw you there, 2023
oil on canvas
41 x 31 cm
\$1,150 incl. GST



And the cows looked on, 2023
oil on canvas
120 x 100 cm
\$3,800 incl. GST

ELLA DUNN

BIOGRAPHY

1994 Born in Sydney, Australia.
Lives & works in Melbourne, Australia

EDUCATION

2017 Bachelor of Fine Art Honours, Victorian College of the Arts
2016 Bachelor of Fine Art (Drawing and Printmaking), First Class Honours, Victorian College of the Arts

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2023 I feel you there, I know you're there, Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne
I touch my shadow. No, my shadow touches me, Saint Cloche, Sydney
2022 Deeper Water, Saint Cloche Gallery, Sydney
2020 Between Days, C3 Gallery Collingwood, Melbourne
2018 Girl from the North Country, Bus Projects Collingwood, Melbourne
You can cut the carrots and I'll start the fire', Sinclair and May, Clifton Hill, Melbourne
Cattle and Cane, The Dirty Dozen Art Space, Campbell Arcade Flinders Street station, Melbourne
2017 Solo Show, University House, Melbourne University

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2022 Best Life, Saint Cloche Sydney
Softly Softly, Michael Reid Northern Beaches, Sydney
2017 Nillumbik Art Prize, Montsalvat, Melbourne
Emerging Artist Award, Forty-Five Downstairs, Melbourne
2016 The Majlis Scholarship exhibition, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne
Play for Keeps, TANS Martial Arts 253 Lygon st.
2015 Melbourne City Library, Melbourne
Sutton Project Space, Melbourne

AWARDS AND RESIDENCES

2022 Finalist in National Emerging Art Prize, Sydney
2017 Runner up in Nillumbik Art prize, Montsalvat
Finalist in Emerging Artist Awards, Forty-Five Downstairs Gallery
2016 Finalist in Majlis Travelling Scholarship, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne
Recipient of National Gallery of Victoria Women's Association Award, VCA Graduate show
2015 Recipient of John Vickery Drawing Scholarship

SOPHIE GANNON GALLERY

2 Albert Street Richmond VIC 3121 Australia T +613 9421 0857

info@sophiegannongallery.com.au www.sophiegannongallery.com.au