

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
 Media Contact: Elizabeth East
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 Telephone: 310-822-4955
 E-mail: Elizabeth@lalouver.com

Fred Williams: The Later Landscapes 1975-1981
 April 8 – May 14, 2005
 Opening Reception: Friday, April 8, 2005, 6-8 p.m.



Kew Billabong, Old Tyre II, 1975, oil on canvas, 42 x 36 1/4 in. [106.7 x 92 cm.]

Venice, CA – L.A. Louver is pleased to announce the first West Coast exhibition of landscape paintings by Fred Williams (1927-1982), one of Australia’s most acclaimed artists.

“Williams distilled the ubiquitous Australian visual realities of eucalypt haze, heat shimmer and random incident into a modernist visual syntax of beautiful concision.”

— — — Sebastian Smee
 ‘Splendid Isolation,’ *The Australian*, January 8, 2005

Fred Williams: The Later Landscapes 1975-1981 presents a selection of the artist’s finest paintings from the height of his career, which were made during the six years that preceded his premature death at age 55 in 1982. All the work included in the exhibition have been selected from the estate of Fred Williams. While the majority of the paintings have been previously loaned to museum exhibitions by the estate, many canvases are shown here for the first time.

The later landscapes represented a shift in Williams’ work, both in subject and process. Color was the chief agent of change: his modulated tonal palette and occasional use of a singular monochrome, expanded to embrace a wider range of hues. Williams also exposed himself to a greater diversity of subject. While previously he had focused on one subject, now he happily worked on several series simultaneously. This renewed vigor and confidence was fueled by a change in working practice: whereas before Williams sketched mainly in gouache *in situ*, and worked on the final compositions back in the studio, now he worked increasingly in oil, *en plein air*.

The locations that inspired the later landscapes included both newly discovered sites, as well as old haunts. In 1975 he found a swampy pond called the billabong, not far from his Melbourne home. Despite serving as a dumping ground, this was an enclosed, horizonless site of beauty and retreat. The same year he painted the *Kew Billabong* series, Williams returned to his beloved You Yangs, a group of stony, scrubby hills southwest of Melbourne. The serene and evocative *Silver Landscape*, 1975 and *Golden Landscape*, 1975 resulted from this trip.

Throughout the late 1970s Williams increasingly sought out the exceptional site over the generic bush, drawn to a landscape where he could observe and paint the elemental forces that shaped the land. The wide, open terrain, and light and heat-filled *Dry Creek Bed*, 1976 from the *Gorges* series demonstrates this pull to evoke such forces, which Williams achieved by combining color with rich impasto on coarse canvas. In counter



Silver Landscape, 1975, oil on canvas, 40 x 40 in. [101.7 x 101.7 cm.]

Continued over

point to this, he thinned paints and used glazes over fine-weave canvas to create his *Waterfall* series.

The waterfalls gave way to Williams' last subject, the *Pilbara* series, which he painted during six weeks from early March to mid-April 1981. Williams had first explored the Pilbara region in northwest Australia—an area of vast space, with brick red outcroppings and flat-topped mesas bathed in an ever-changing spectacular light—in 1979. Haunted by his first experience of flying over the land, the paintings that capture the shifting atmosphere and resonate colors of the landscape include several aerial views such as *Coastline (A)*, 1981 and *Riverbed (C)*, 1981.



Riverbed (C), 1981, oil on canvas, 71 7/8 x 39 7/8 in. [182.5 x 152.1 cm.]

Throughout his career Fred Williams strove to capture the structure, color and light of the landscape. The paintings that he made changed the way Australians looked at their country.

Fred Williams received his early training at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School. He continued his studies in London where, during six years in the early 1950s, he attended part-time both the Chelsea Art School and the Central School of Arts and Crafts. Returning to Australia in 1957, Williams spent the following decade painting the landscape around Melbourne. He exhibited widely in Australia during this period, earning critical acclaim, and respect from both his peers and a younger emerging generation of artists. By the mid-1970s Williams also had become something of a public figure in Australia, invited to join many public bodies there. He became a member of both the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board and the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, as well as a trustee the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne. Further, James Mollison, the first director of the National Gallery of Australia, invited Williams to become a trustee of the Gallery, where Williams proved instrumental in the early formation of its collection.

Although best known in Australia, where he is considered a national treasure and is represented in depth in the collections of the National Gallery of Victoria, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and the National Gallery of Australia, Williams has also been honored with exhibitions worldwide. Solo shows include the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1977 (curated by W.S. Liebermann); a major traveling retrospective exhibition within Australia 1987-1989; the Serpentine Gallery, London, and the Ulster Museum, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 1988; and the British Museum, London, 2003-2004.

Fred Williams: The Later Landscapes 1975-1981 is accompanied by a 60-page color catalogue that includes an essay by Patrick McCaughey. McCaughey, former director of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (1981-87); the Wadsworth Atheneum, (1988-96) and The Yale Center for British Art (1996-2001), produced the first comprehensive monograph on Williams in 1980. In 2003 McCaughey published an Australian memoir, *The Bright Shapes and the True Names* (Text, Melbourne); he lives and writes in New Haven, Connecticut.



For further information and visuals, please contact:
Elizabeth East, L.A. Louver, 45 North Venice Boulevard, Venice, CA
90291; telephone 310-822-4955; fax: 310-821-7529;
e-mail: Elizabeth@lalouver.com; website: www.lalouver.com