



Dear Friends and supporters of Orange Regional Gallery

I hope everyone is staying safe and warm during these isolation days.

This week's collection highlight was acquired in 2020 for the Gallery's permanent collection, by the Friends of Orange Regional Gallery (FORG). Over the past 30 years, FORG have assisted with the purchase of over 30 significant artworks for the collection.

Orange Regional Gallery has a growing collection of 20th century and contemporary painting and we look forward to including *Yellow crane, Rotterdam* 2018 in our future permanent collection exhibitions. The Gallery's collection includes a number of works which explore the built environment, with Hendrik Kolenberg's work being our most recent addition. The work was acquired from his recent exhibition at May Space, Sydney, *Hendrik Kolenberg & Evan Salmon: Urbanscapes*, 2020 (29 January to 16 February 2020).

I had an opportunity recently to catch up with Hendrik over the phone from Sydney to discuss this painting and his general approach to making images.

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### Collection Highlight

Hendrik Kolenberg, *Yellow crane, Rotterdam*, 2018



*Always, everywhere, people have walked, veining the earth with paths visible and invisible, symmetrical or meandering.*  
– Thomas Clark, 'In Praise of Walking'.<sup>1</sup>

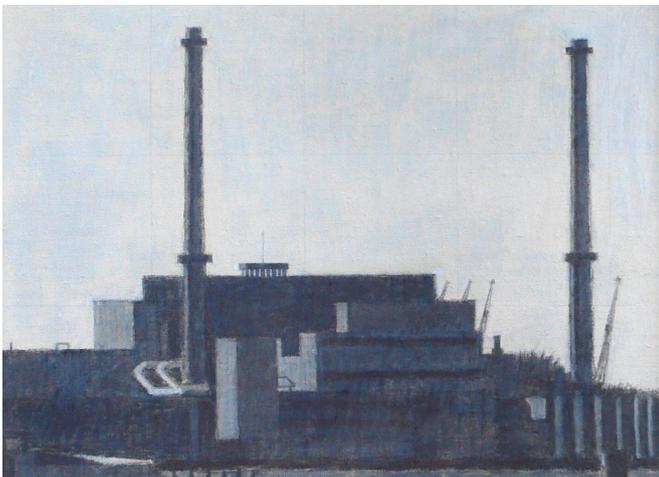
For Hendrik Kolenberg, walking is an essential part of his working process and a way of coming to know particular places, of internalising them.

He walks compulsively, and often, over long distances, describing this routine as 'thinking time' and a way of walking out his inherent restlessness. 'Walking is the secret' he says, 'and it is by walking around that I really get to understand places and discover the subjects for my work'.<sup>2</sup>

Since he was an art student in the 1960s, Hendrik Kolenberg has been a wayfarer of the back streets, construction sites and working harbours of Sydney, and other cities including Rotterdam—the Dutch city of his birth. His parents emigrated to Australia from Rotterdam in 1952 when he was six—a move which has shaped his identity and informed his creative life.

Like many migrant artists, Kolenberg uses art as a means of navigating between different worlds, of mapping his life here in Australia while maintaining and deepening his connection to the Netherlands. Depictions of everyday urban street scenes, factories and working harbours, are part of an ongoing project to situate himself and make sense of where he is. His work is infused with a fascination with cities and an innate desire to understand how things work.

Describing himself as 'from a working class background' and 'essentially interested in working class subjects', Kolenberg is drawn to ugliness, grime and industrial areas. So his paintings naturally don't depict sentimental or pretty subjects, rather they convey his fascination with the overlooked, discarded or functional aspects of the city. For him each is transformed by the fall of light.



Hendrik Kolenberg, *Roteb, Maashaven, Rotterdam* 2008, oil on gesso on linen on plywood, 71cm x 88cm. Private Collection.

Urban environments, with their bold architectural juxtapositions, hold a lasting appeal for Kolenberg. 'I'm not as interested in the details as I am in the overall essence of things' he adds. 'I like things stripped of detail.'

While there is a reductive element in his work, he also pays careful attention to the particularity of architectural or industrial structures, so that his images open up an intriguing space between real-world observations and minimal compositions.

It is usually the effect of light, the intensification of colour, or the simple shape of a structure that first grabs Kolenberg's attention. 'The things I really like, and which I've come to trust as subjects, are those which appear suddenly or

which are fleeting. Once they have my attention, I then feel I have to understand them, and painting is my way of understanding them.'



Hendrik Kolenberg, *Inholland, Rijnhaven, Rotterdam* 2014, oil on gesso on linen on plywood. Collection of the artist.

So it was with this yellow crane in Leuvehaven, one of the oldest ports in Rotterdam. The painting depicts the upper section of a colossal tower crane which Kolenberg first glimpsed over the rooftop of an apartment block, represented by the horizontal line at the bottom of the painting.

The underlying compositional arrangement is economical and direct, delivering the drama of the original scene as it first appeared to him. It presents a structural juxtaposition of two disparate things; the triangular yellow crane placed against the monolithic grey apartment blocks. It is this layering of geometric shapes that gives the work monumentality and presence despite its modest physical size.

An intriguing aspect of Kolenberg's work is the chalky shimmer he achieves with a reduced colour palette combined with its beautiful matte surface quality. He worked quickly with essentially two colours, yellow-ochre and slate grey against a white sky. To achieve this he laid a ground of traditional gesso—made by mixing powdered chalk and rabbit skin glue—on the linen support. This surface is highly absorptive as it soaks up the 'turpsy-washes' of thin oil paint giving the finished works an airy dryness akin to parchment.

'Colour affected by light intrigues me the most', he says, adding that 'light is often paler than we realise and in my works the tonal value is often pitched up'.

This tonal shift is a key element in Kolenberg's works which sets them apart from Realism, creating instead a sense of images held in the artist's mind. His works are unsentimental, yet deeply personal, as he distils his acute observations and experiences to their essence.

**Bradley Hammond**  
Director, Orange Regional Gallery

<sup>1</sup> Extracted from Macfarlane, Robert (2012), *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot*, Penguin UK. Chapter two.

<sup>2</sup> All quotes taken from a conversation between Hendrik Kolenberg and Bradley Hammond on 23 April 2020.