PETER CEREDIG-EVANS

THROUGH FORGOTTEN GLADES

Interview by Atorina Saliba
Photography by Robbie Ceredig-Evans

Peter Ceredig-Evans is a British painter working out of his studio on the Gold Coast. Now into his thirties, Peter has shown a talent and curiosity for painting at a very early age. His father built him an easel when he was a young boy, and he's never moved away from the canvas since. Peter later studied painting and fine arts at the Bath School of Art & Design, where he further developed his skills and gathered even more support from teachers and peers alike. Already selling his work through international galleries upon graduation, Peter burst into the art scene quite rapidly, perhaps pushing him even further in his work.

Over the past couple of years, he has thrown himself into unchartered territories, moving away from figurative painting to increasingly abstract work, filtering different landscapes and environments into experimental travels of paint and canvas. Like the man who left the cave, climbed the mountain, and returned to the people to tell the others what he's seen, so too are the many works of Peter Ceredig-Evans —they're grounded in discovery and insight.

Aerial views of the Earth, landscapes, dreamscapes, topography, and ghost-like images all float in and out of view, leaving the spectator to lose themselves in these abstract meditations in paint; and more reason to leave the house and see these paintings up close.

As much as social media platforms may help artists to get the work out there to millions of users, it comes at a cost of losing a dimension of the work itself in the process. An Instagram snap becomes a robot's retelling of an artwork, overlooking all the curious little nuances, textures, and different strokes of paintbrushes, rollers, and shoe prints that pop out and add to the journey as your eyes scan through the canvas.

I visited Peter in his studio, seeing how his new works were coming along, and had a quick chat about art, technology, travel, and the process of painting.

Peter Ceredig-Evans: Even if I'm not painting, or if I don't feel like actually picking up a brush and making something, I'll look at books. I've got a couple of books by Georg Baselitz. Do you know who Georg Baselitz is? German painter, amazing. I just sit here and I look at it and I get so inspired. Or I'll read about his practice or I watch interviews about artists, like Daniel Richter. I watched this amazing interview with him and how he talks about it. So, having a studio space just for that is great.

Atorina Saliba: **It's a space where you're sp even if yo canvas. So on the can** Absolutely stays in t a very gr tion and deconstruction as the works evolve. I see just being with the work

as part of the process. Eighty per cent of it is just looking.

It's exciting to see what you're working on, despite your reluctance to reveal unfinished work. You mentioned that you were accepted into one of the top art schools in England and, upon graduating, you were soon signed to a gallery. For a young artist, these opportunities would have been exciting signs of encouragement in your artmaking endeavour. Explain your training and development as an artist.

I went to the Bath School of Design. We were given a studio with a group of artists, and they would just tell us to paint whatever we wanted. It was all self-directed, the work. You couldn't just make something, you had to be able to contextualise the work and talk about why you're doing it—if you had conceptual reasons behind it or if it's literal painting. That was just awesome, three years at Bath School Art and Design. Every week you'd have a crit, where you'd critique work. I remember sometimes I missed those because I was playing sport or I was hungover. Looking back now, though, I wish I hadn't missed any of them because they were all so good, they were all valuable. I learned lots about painting, the oils, the property of the pigment. It's a real science, oil painting. There's so much you can do with different mediums and the paint's so flexible. Just with a few colours, you can create so many different tones and shades and colours. I learnt how to build canvases and stretch them with different materials: cotton, linen, or whatever it was. Prime them. I would've been eighteen, nineteen. At the end of the year, a gallery bought my show and that was a bit of a confidence boost to carry on painting. I loved painting anyway, but I knew at the same time I had to get a job to fund just living, I wasn't going to make money just painting, I wasn't going to make a living as an artist. It's weird how if you come out of uni studying marketing, you can get a job. If you study art, you can't get a job in art.

Unless you're in production design.

Unless you're a graphic designer. You can get a job in graphic design. I'd been drawing and painting most of my life. When I was very young, I was constantly doing observational drawings, animals or wildlife, or being out in nature. My mum is an artist, she got me doing that very young. I used to study books on Michelangelo because he was brilliant, from drawing hands or bodies, whatever it was. Gareth Edwards was very good at teaching me about painting and colour theory. At uni it was very much, "Here's a studio, we'll do critiques." But you had to really explore it yourself. There's a technician there who was amazing, who was super valuable. He actually taught me loads about the actual paint, about what materials to use, what materials not to use. He taught me about how to use an oil-based primer called thixotropic. You could then also heat up rabbit skin crystals in a pot, add hot water, turning it into a gluey resin which you can then pile over the canvas and make it go super tight. It creates a very good layer to put your oil-based primer on top. It's a beautiful layer for painting on. Lots of the masters, like Turner, would have done similar.

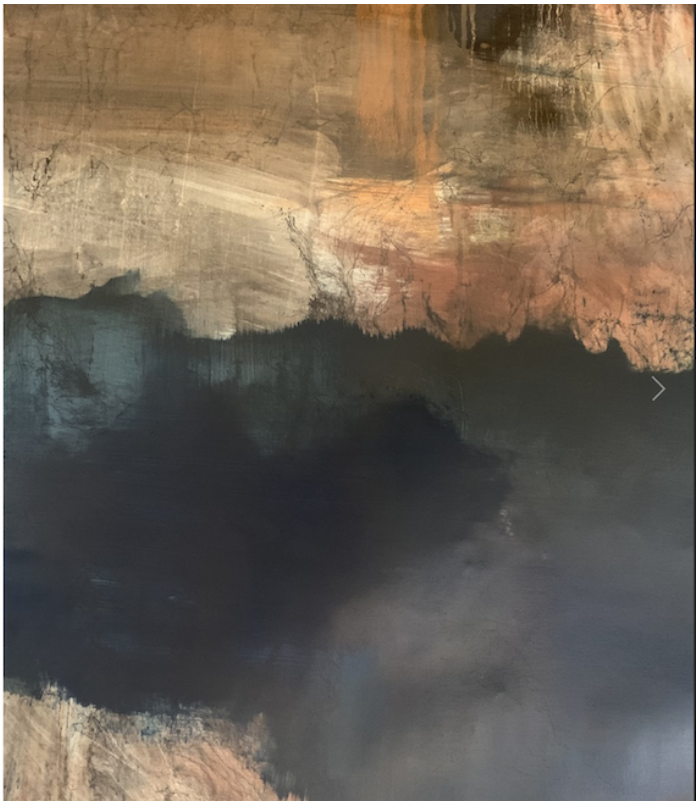
Let's talk about your exhibition *Forma* (2020). Nature influences these pieces, specifically aerial landscapes and terra formations explored via abstract aesthetics, as evident in *Carved by Glaciers* (2020) and others in the collection. How did this exhibition come to fruition?

It's funny, I didn't start with aerial. I was exploring Australian landscapes, but I was collecting imagery, memories, from going places. It's an incredible landscape, from very lush green verde or very dry arid places. There are always amazing colour inspirations. I wanted to put together these works, some smaller works and some big works, and they were abstract. I was mainly building them off compositions of colour and mark-making. As these pieces were building, I was more and more focused on the topography of the Australian landscape. When I'm looking at things from above, I can break it down into shapes and maybe draw similarities or even reference pieces of my paintings but keep it abstract. As soon as I start looking at something from a visual perspective, and there's a cliff or there's some kind of land, it's very easy for the viewer, and myself, to associate it with the landscape and take control of the work. I started looking at images from above, getting several different images and collaging them together until I've got a subject matter or composition, which, when you look at it you immediately think of something of the natural world because of the colours and the marks. But also you're questioning reality and perspective because I've mashed it together in a way, maybe from several different viewpoints.

That was really solving an issue for me where I was able to reference nature, marks I see in the ground, or the changing surfaces of the landscape. There've been really bad fires at the start of 2020, and I looked at all these different images of the fires and how that massively changed the landscape. *Carved by Glaciers*, that's a body of water from South Australia. It was actually formed by a glacier 10,000 years ago when Australia was covered in ice in the last Ice Age. Which I didn't even realise it was only 10,000 years ago, it's not even that long. This body of water was created from this big, huge glacier. I got really interested in this and for me, it was solving this issue of allowing me to explore and create compositions on the canvas that viewers could almost sense something familiar because of the colours and the textures to something similar of nature. But, at the same time, it would throw them as to the reality of the subject matter and what perspective they were looking at.

Is that what you were playing with before the exhibition, and the opportunity came up so you created the work for *Forma*?

No, I wasn't exploring it before the show. I was making some work and they were abstract paintings with some landscape references. And that's where I was like, "How can I continue to explore these, but not use traditional landscape perspectives?" It became a natural transition for me to make works from above. John Wilson, the owner of Dust Temple, was in here critiquing my work. I was telling him about how I was studying the changing surfaces of the landscape,



how I'm representing that change and movement in the painting, and he said it was like terraforming. And then I started looking more into that, and geomythology in general.

You wouldn't think of abstract painting when you think of landscape. I had a university teacher who told me the painters from the first British colonies that began to settle in Australia would depict the rough Australian landscape to look more like Britain by replacing the Australian trees with British trees. I don't know how true this is, but the goal was to send back these paintings to appeal to the Brits so they would move over here, to the new country. Thinking about this, and then seeing your work, it's a fresh insight into the genre of landscape painting and how to represent it.

I'm not sure how long this is something I want to do. This one here, it's called *Orbit*. As in something orbiting, like a satellite orbiting around Earth. So, I was looking at different images, again using Google Earth, and looking in space for different images. I found all these amazing, different images, beautiful colours, so I just got a few images together and I just started painting from those.

The colours that you add to it, it's not exactly what you would see in the land or in the image.

Yeah, that's it. When you're putting colours onto the canvas, as soon as those colours are on the canvas, everything has to work. Doesn't matter if that colour is representing something from a photograph or representing something from real life or a memory—that colour and everything else in the canvas has to go well together. So, if I'm working from an image or I'm working from an idea, or cut-outs from several magazines, or whatever it is, there has to be a point where I put that down and stop looking at it because I have to be very aware of the colours and mark-making, the composition, the subtle little pigment variations on the canvas.

Otherwise, it can fall out of balance. How do you know when you've reached the right point? Because you have all this information in your mind, plus what you're trying to execute—is it a feeling or instinct? Or does it match the image you have in your mind?

There's a process to it and it doesn't always follow the same process. I work on the paintings and I step back, or I leave and come back to work on it more. There's definitely this innate process to it where I'll just do something and it feels right. And if it's not, I'll put it back and move it. I definitely will add it to the painting and remove it again, this construction and deconstruction aspect to it. I don't always trust myself looking at the painting, so I'll do something and know if I come back to it a day later I might know what to do, or at least I might know that what I've done wasn't right and I have to get rid of it.

It's funny, because when I'm working on a story, and I write a line that feels false, that line will sit in my throat like a stone until I remove it. Does it sit in your mind if you know it's not right?

Definitely. I definitely see paintings in my mind before I make them. When I'm spending a lot of time on work, or looking at different artists work, I'll sometimes dream about paintings and have a strong image of the painting in my mind, and I'll wake up in the middle of the night and I'll just write it down quickly.

You write it down instead of sketching it?

I write it down because in my mind I might see a painting or a composition, and I might see several marks and several colours, so I'll write down what those colours were. And I might do a quick sketch of what it might be. Often those paintings are the ones that come the quickest. They resolve really fast because I know what it is. Often I'll start working on something and I have no idea which way it's going to go. And it just starts happening.

Are both methods exciting?

For sure. When I don't know which way I'm going with a painting, it goes through a period of being developed, pulled back, re-worked—that can sometimes be painful, frustrating, because I don't know where I'm going with it. I have to take a lot of risks and I'm constantly trying to look at the painting and ask, "Where is this going, what's working with this painting, what am I trying to achieve?" I try not to think about all the amount of money I've wasted on paints that now sit on the floor.

It's all part of the process, though. You need to waste a few tubes of paint because, like you said, sometimes they come out really quick.

That's it, and when they come out quick, I look at it and think, "That actually worked really well." It's interesting. I'm looking at this painting on the wall and now I've put this white on it, and it's just working pretty well.

[We're looking at a painting that Peter showed me when I first walked in. It's a floor to ceiling canvas smeared with white paint. Beneath the white, there's an echo of what it used to be, a painting he wasn't satisfied with and decided to recycle the canvas.]

Does this one have a title yet?

No. But in my head I have an idea of what I want to do with that. I want to almost create a scene of a mountain, a snowy mountain from above. I found this picture of this resort in Italy, from above. In a place called Monte Rosa, two hours north of Milan. I had an idea of creating this painting of some mountains but from above. I just wanted to create a painting that had a lot of white. It was light, not like a dark blue or dark landscape. And I wanted to build in all these subtle pigments but keep it quite abstract because it's going to be from above. I've been to this ski resort called Champoluc, and I remember the light there being beautiful. The light was like—when you get the sunset and the snow, it all turns to a gorgeous pink. Yeah, so I have an idea of what I'm going to do with this.

Are you trying to recreate that impression specifically, or is the aim to see where it leads you?

I'm wanting to create something, certainly, that I can relate to in terms of that feeling of being there, the colours and that memory, but also create it in a way that allows the viewer to have their own adventure with it; where they can see it and it might look familiar. Or, they see something, and they have their own unique take on it. It exists in its own way, in its own right. I don't want it to be too personal to me. That's why I like abstract painting. I like how there's room for that.

That painting *[Jungle Carnival II]*, I took so much risk. That painting really evolved and manifested into what it is there in such a strange and unusual way. That painting had been in the studio for so long, it had so many different layers on it. I would put something on, but I didn't like it, so I put a thick acrylic paint on it to hardwire what I'd done before. I used loads more oil on top and dragged it across through some materials, and whip the painting.

It seems like there's a shadow falling.

It's almost like looking over a sunset or something, you're looking into the woods but there's a load of smoke coming into your eyes and your view's obstructed. Those colours are hot, sticky.

Was *Jungle Carnival II* based on aerial shots too?

That painting was from just being up in Currumbin Valley. I would be up there at different times, different weather. The painting, it was very physical, the finished state is in there. All the mark-making, it has a lot of immediacy about it. I was pouring paint on the floor, whipping it around, walking on it, dropping paint onto it and building it up. There are loads of different layers. It just happened, it just sort of resolved. All these subtle little marks, I got that from whipping the canvas with a rag. The canvas was very wet, it had a lot of turpentine. It also had a lot of oil and acrylic paint in it, which you shouldn't do. I'm influenced by so much, but when I was back in London,

I'd go to Tate Modern, Tate Britain, the White Cube, or whichever gallery it was, and look at these incredible artists. I was always fascinated, I would get up close and think, "How did they make that mark? How did they create such an incredible effect on that scale?" And that's what motivates me, inspires me to try and create these marks and create things where the viewer looks at it and think, "How did he do that?"

You are a painter's painter. You could not have been anything but a painter. Because of the way you approach a work, it's beyond an idea. It's about the technique, the texture, the colour, and the "How did they do that?"
It's a really physical thing.

In another exhibition, you had a painting called *The Crossing* (2019) which has elements of figurative painting rather than being purely abstract. But you've since come to the conclusion that human figures in your paintings can limit audience participation with a particular work, and so removing a figure from a landscape can perhaps allow the viewer to go searching further into the canvas. Tell me more about this process.
That exhibition, my work was pretty figurative. I haven't always been an abstract painter. My work was the use of exploring the space between abstraction and figuration, and I would always anchor the painting with a literal reference. Maybe of a loose scene depicted, or a figure in that scene. But my work needed to move. I needed to move into abstraction. It just felt like what I needed to do. I was already very interested in abstract mark-making and painting, and the basic aesthetics of abstract like textures, colour, composition, mark-making. But I'd almost been trying to do two things when I was painting. So, I stopped using figures and started moving to complete abstraction and that journey carried on. I definitely feel like there's a language I'm using which is quite unique to oil paint. And it feels pretty true that what I'm doing at the moment is what I should be doing. I hope they all don't look the same because I definitely don't want to do that. I'd give up if they did. I'm always trying to move the work forward. I feel like I'm at the beginning of my career.

What was the idea behind the exhibition *No Foreign Lands* (2018)?
I was exploring the idea of different places, and the whole idea of 'No Foreign Lands' was that it was supposed to be that everyone has a right to be anywhere. And actually, it's our journey how we go to these places and the experiences we have, and our relationship with other people, which is the important thing. Breaking barriers down, immigration, all of those things. *The Crossing* was particularly powerful subject matter because it was of a raft floating in the Mediterranean where asylum seekers were stuck on this raft and they were trying to get out. The image was captured by a photographer for *The Guardian* in the UK. I found it online and it was a moving image.

Why I mention *The Crossing* is because since then you've gone deep into abstract, and that was only two years ago.
The viewer plays a really important part in my work. I want the viewer to look at the painting and have their own experience. With these works, yes they are abstract, but there are references inside them which the viewer can take and relate to. But I don't want the paintings to be personal to me, I'm not leaving any figure in there which is personal to myself. They're much more open to interpretation, and that's really important. There's this one painting which is called *Jungle Carnival*, with these people on a boat; they were going around the river, on this adventure, there was this sense of, you know, they were heading somewhere. For me, I was really excited by those kinds of ideas, using figures in my work but loosely depicting them to allow the viewer to connect with them. There's this narrative which is happening and it's relatable.

Technology is a bittersweet tool in the world today. For art, it's an economic way to share artworks around the world without the financial strain of moving or possibly damaging the canvas. But presenting a painting in this fashion takes away from the artwork and actually produces a different image. For example, *Collision II* (2020) and *Jungle Carnival II* (2020) are textured when seen in person, and you've achieved this by peeling back layers of paint and embracing imperfections. It's these glorious touches of the artist's hand that are missing from the glossy LCD screen.

It reminds me of the Impressionists' reviled reaction to artists such as Bouguereau, whose work failed to show the artist's brush, like a precursor to Photoshopping imperfections. As a reaction to this, the Impressionists were compelled to experiment even further. At the same time, the invention of new technologies allows the artist to experiment in their chosen fields.

What are your thoughts on the intrusion of technology in art? And, on a personal note, how has technology impacted your artmaking process?
Look, there's some great things about it, that you can view some different good artists' work or keep up to date with new works or sell works off the image. They see it, they buy it, then they get the painting. And I hope they like it. Often, I get messages saying there's so many textures, so much depth.

By the same token, people won't buy something because they'll make assumptions about it. "It looks flat, it looks small." It's not about buying or selling work. I want the work to be enjoyed, looked at. So, I want to be working toward exhibits and putting on shows where people come and look at the work rather than look at it through a phone. I'm pretty old school with the way I paint. I use the same kind of paint and approaches that artists have been doing for the last hundred years, more. Using camera or satellite to get images of the Earth is really cool, really handy, it allows me to explore the subject, to get inspiration for compositions that I might not have had.

And you texture the image. The satellite image takes away all the natural marks, but you recreate them. It's not something you can see in person; you need technology for it. Does it impact the process? When you're in the midst of artmaking, when you're whipping the paint or throwing the colour on there, do you think about technology affecting the execution?
No. Because I think it's something that can't be scaled. When I'm in the studio, you can smell the paint, you can smell the turpentine, you can touch the canvas, and I'm there working on it until I turn the lights off, lock the studio, and leave for the day. Until the next time. Maybe with digital art, I don't know. I know this digital art piece that sold online for around sixty-something million.

A digital piece would not survive time. It requires electricity to survive because, otherwise, how would you view that image? It survives today, for now. Tangible pieces, they can be here forever. Just like how the ancient Egyptians inscribed on rock because rock lasts forever.
That's the thing with painting, I love that. I have the most amazing memories and experiences walking into a gallery and seeing these paintings on the wall by Rothko, Turner, Whistler. I mean, I've seen loads of Whistler's paintings of the embankment in London, these sketches, and there's just something so unique and personal about them. They have such a real story behind them. It's not like a car that's been put through a load of robots making it, it's just these one-off pieces.

It's very personal and unique. The amount of time the artist was spending with that piece—all their impressions, all their feelings, whoever they were in that moment, it's all there in the canvas. It's not going to be the same on another canvas a year later. The artist is now a different person. With digital art, they're selling a piece, an object, but traditional art, it's selling a journey.
I think that's why I'm attracted to subtle mark-making and very subtle textures on the surface of the canvas because they look like imperfections but they are what make the painting unique and perfect.

How do you break out of a rut when you find yourself being unable to paint?
I try and continue trying to make work. I always try and take risks in my work. And when I paint in a way that takes risks—like I'm taking risks with these… that's when I get inspired and I learn things. I try not to repeat myself too much, I try not to fall into the habit of doing the stuff which looks good, which is easy for me. Stuff which I find easy to do and people go "Oh, that's great how do you do that?"—it's because I've done it before. And then because I've done it before, there's a habit, and so it's my method, but method becomes bad habit. So, I try and break that. I'm breaking these. [He points to *Collision*] This is my last show. I've got to move it forward and that's just internal satisfaction for me. I definitely feel almost torn between colour palettes as well. I feel sometimes torn between creating something very natural, very naturistic and a study of the earth. Or a closeup of something, you know like Howard Hodgkin or Per Kirkeby, his works are beautiful. I also like industrial, man-made synthetic material as well, and imitating those in compositions and colours. Or I'll read as well. I'll read books. Like I was saying earlier, I would read about artists, look at their images and I'm like "Shit, that's awesome." Or I'll do smaller studies and get inspired.

Do you think your colour choice would have changed if you hadn't moved to a beach town?
Massively. Moving to Australia, my colour palette's changed. My colour has matured, and my colour consideration has matured naturally just from me working more on my paintings. But then I'm definitely impacted and inspired by what's around me. I think if I'd gone to a rainy city, stayed in London or been in New York, the painting, the colour palette would've been…

More monochrome?
Yeah, maybe. And muted.

Earlier, we spoke about the importance of space and creativity. Your studio space allows you to not only paint, but to engage in other creative endeavours when you've reached a block in your work. If we look at it on a larger scale, what role does the environment play in your work?
Having a space is so important and special. It's where the paintings live and it's where you, as an artist, can come and sit and just look. I'll come in here and read books. I sit here and can see my paintings on the walls, and I can see these artists' works that I admire and be inspired by. I think to myself, "Okay, what is it that I want to do with mine, to push mine to another level, how can I move myself forward?" I come to the space and my paintings hang on the wall, propped up. At the moment there are twelve paintings. I might work on three at a time, four at a time. I have materials in here, turpentines, mediums, enamel paint, acrylics, oils, brushes. It's ready. All I have to do is come in here and put some music on. But working is also just sitting and looking, working out where to go next or what to remove, what to add. There's this silent dialogue that occurs between me and the work. It feels like the painting is asking these questions or proposing these obstacles, and it's my job as the artist to resolve it and answer back by applying paint and creating a new composition. It's a place where I get completely absorbed by the work. I go into a state of flow. I find the work is challenging but also feels completely natural. ■

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