



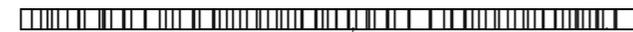
Steve des Landes

Williamson Art Gallery, 2026

Adam & Eve III

Adam & Eve is a powerful image that explores the polarity of emotions which exist in close relationships, and the complexities which arise from a love that is sparked between two opposing energies: masculine and feminine. The physical work in this image is shared by both the man and the woman, but their priorities seem split. The man wears long red protective gloves, which reflect the red of the small fruit lying in front of him, whilst the woman, hunched over and unprotected, is wrapping her arms around the small tree that she is attempting to nurture into life.

Both figures seem to be working at cross purposes, a notion amplified by the wall of thistles that grows between them; a literal barrier to Adam and his malicious intentions, causing him to twist away from Eve and her important task.



Steve des Landes

LOYALTY

An Exhibition of Paintings by

Steve des Landes

Williamson Art Gallery

15 January - 23 May, 2026

With thanks to

WILLIAMSON
ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM

MESSUM'S
DAVID MESSUM FINE ART - EST 1963



Foreward - David Boyd Haycock

British writer and curator

I first met Steve des Landes in 2018, on a visit to his Birkenhead studio with the London art dealer David Messum. We were both impressed by what we saw: here was a strong, dynamic vision expressed in a series of brightly coloured, tightly structured canvasses that explored contemporary life, and contemporary landscapes.

It was clear Steve's vision was idiosyncratic and highly personal. There were couples in cramped interiors, figures crammed in groups, in streets or standing before wide open landscapes; twisted limbs, a blouse half open, a glance off into a corner, a weary smile, a murder of crows. There appeared to be an underlying symbolism to many of the paintings that heightened their emotional depth and intrigue. There was a sense of mystery - a hint sometimes of

violence, or tragedy, distress or even wry humour. You could feel that here was an artist searching for something - just as the figures in his paintings seemed to be searching: for a missing object, a love lost, or a meaning or purpose of some kind. Post-Impressionism and German Expressionism were clear influences. He cites Max Beckman's nightmarish 1919 painting *Die Nacht* ('The Night') as one of his favourite works, whilst a love of early Northern Renaissance painting has influenced his shallow, tight use of visual space.

Like Beckman's paintings, Steve's are expressions of deep felt emotion, a reflection of an anxiety he senses in the world around him. They usually come to him as images in his mind, which he develops through a process of numerous small drawings and then by wrestling them onto the canvas. It's a back-and-forth struggle - putting a picture away, sometimes for months, before coming back to it again. Yet they need to be spontaneous, too. He requires that spur-of-the-moment reaction to make them live. He studied diligently in the life class at art school, but all his figures now are drawn from memory. It's an inner vision and drive that makes them happen. 'Painting a picture, I've got to go to the nth degree,' he says. 'I've got to push it. To see where it will go.'

Two solo exhibitions at Messum's Gallery in 2020 and 2022 brought his work to a wider public (one painting was bought by Florence Welch, lead vocalist with indie rock band Florence + the Machine). And his residency at the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum in Birkenhead through 2025 has helped him develop his vision with even greater assurance. 'Being able to work in a large, open airy studio has really opened up my ideas with renewed confidence and enthusiasm,' he explains. 'And a dialogue with the public has created an interesting and playful environment to work in.' He's been delighted with the way people have reacted to the new, more challenging work. 'It's galvanized me to make me more focused, less willing to please, to take risks.'

He's still developing his language to better express his vision, and knows he's moving towards something darker, less compromising. Around the turn of the century the Manchester-born artist Hughie O'Donoghue wrote that

he had 'never believed that artists wholly control the meaning of their work. Meaning accrues, it is a product of what is invested in the work. What is important is that there is some intensity, the painter has to take some risks with the picture in an effort to achieve candor and authenticity.' I couldn't agree more - and I think this is what Steve des Landes is aiming at, too. To unwrap himself, to discover what probably all Modern artists since Gauguin and van Gogh have been trying to express - what Steve calls 'the psychological, emotional side of me - my internal world.' He's trying to put it out there - to make it visible. To make it live. The meaning is there for us to find.

Josh Mackarell

Curator for the Williamson

Clenched hands, half-turned faces, and vengeful glares draw us into Steve des Landes' world: a space where conflict and disquiet linger in every cropped gesture. An artist of various influences, des Landes' work blends unsettling distortion and peculiar colour palettes, making for a unique concoction of Stanley Spencer and German Expressionism. But infused within this is his own distinctive personality and vigour.

Such a style perhaps set him apart from the world of Merseyside art from which he initially grew from, much of which can be found in the Williamson collection. Richard Young, Adrien Henri, Shaun Rice, all of whom Steve admires, but none of which provide a direct referent. Although these artists explore the figurative, none investigate the relationships between personas quite like Steve. His models are often creations from his own mind, spawning from an imaginary space that the artist himself does not fully grasp. Yet within these creations, we see the turmoil, bitterness, and at times tenderness of human connection. A furtive glance, an untaken hand, or an uncomfortable physical distance is oft all that is required for his paintings to communicate a novella's worth of character study.

It has been a privilege for I and the rest of the Williamson to observe and converse with Steve about these aspects of his work throughout his residency. Bringing making into the heart of the gallery has provided a new vibrancy to our spaces, an energy which has also been beneficial to Steve's own practice. During his stay, he has completed various works that have provided an evolution to his visual style. A sparing use of white has given his works a grimmer, darker feel, whilst a newfound freedom for painting for a gallery space has allowed for a more grave and melancholic tone.

A mutual invigoration, our hope is for Steve's energy, talent, and unconventionality to inspire our community, artists, and spaces long beyond his residency.

David Messum

There are I have found very few artists in today's market who can take life on in a direct manner. Steve Des Landes has the confidence to do so and he has always impressed me with the directness of his vision.

He lays paint in well, confident of his chosen subject whether taken from still life portrayals, or imaginative figure subjects, there is always a sense of commitment within his work. He is a Modern Master painter.



Fig. 1
107 x 81 cm

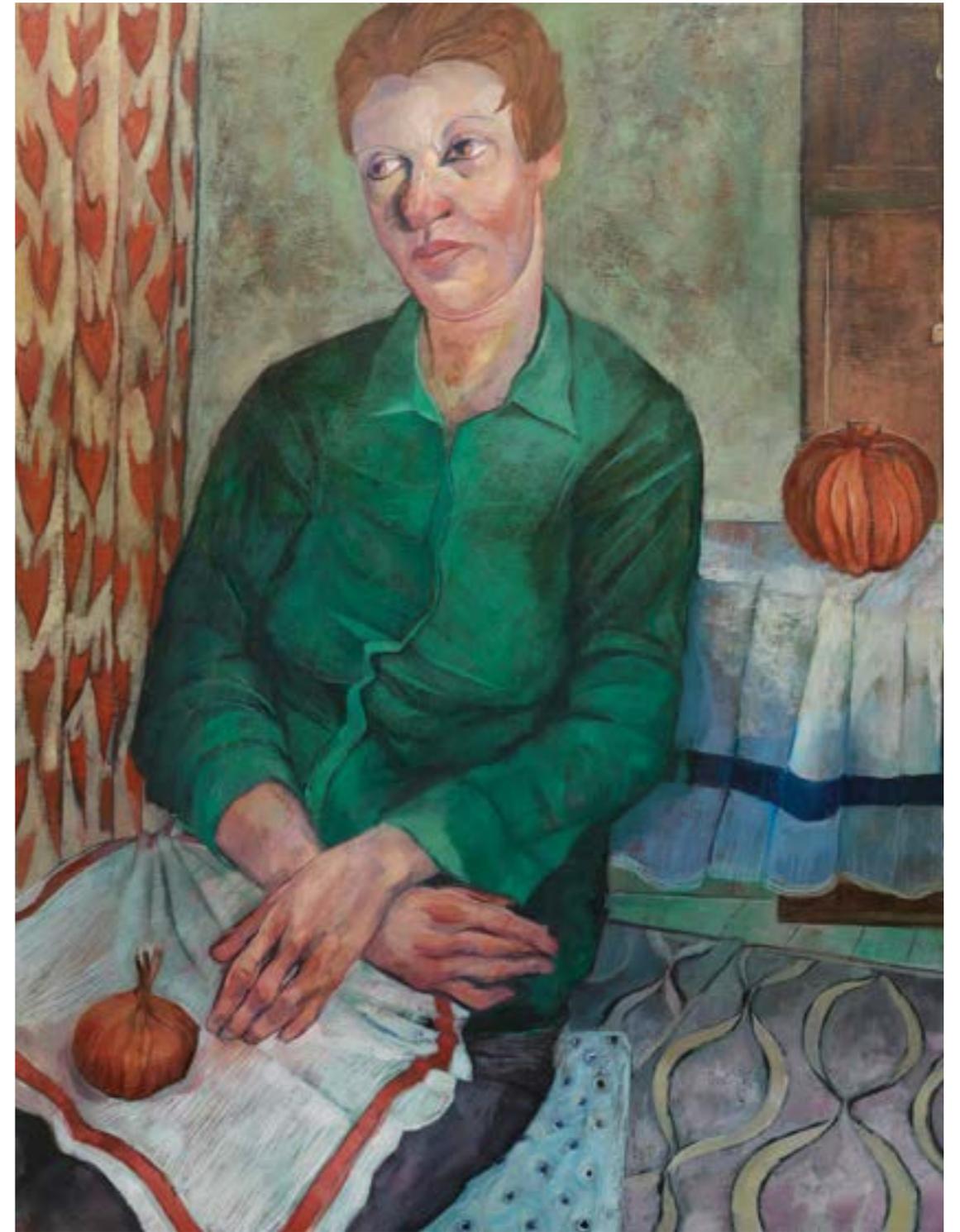


Fig. 2
Cipolla
107 x 81 cm



Fig. 3
91 x 91 cm



Fig. 4
122 x 122 cm



Fig. 5
J.M.W. Turner & J.M.W. Turner
122 x 150 cm



Fig. 6
J.M.W. Turner
Reflective
122 x 91 cm



Fig. 7
91 x 91 cm



Fig. 8
81 x 107 cm



Fig. 9
□□□□ & □□□□
122 x 122 cm



Fig. 10
□□□□ & □□□□
122 x 152 cm



Fig. 11
122 x 122 cm



Fig. 12
102 x 102 cm



Fig. 13
92 x 92 cm



Fig. 14
77 x 102 cm



Fig. 15
92 x 122 cm



Fig. 16
92 x 92 cm

The landscape around Plex Moss, and the countryside of Steve's childhood, is littered with the twisted remains of barns built out of corrugated iron. These structures, not dissimilar to Nissen huts in construction, were used as outbuildings for the farms that populated the area. Many remain today as twisted, rusted and decaying totems of a former world that existed in the low-lying hinterland between Liverpool and Preston. It is a pathetic backdrop to the melodrama of *Letting Go II*, and the inner turmoil of the female protagonist as she looks away from the life she knew and one she must let go.



Fig. 17
90 x 100 cm



Fig. 18
76 x 76 cm



Fig. 19
122 x 122 cm



Fig. 20
122 x 122 cm



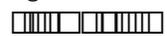
Fig. 21
122 x 150 cm



Fig. 22
154 x 198 cm



Fig. 23



147 x 188 cm



Fig. 24



122 x 122 cm



Fig. 25
122 x 150 cm



Fig. 26
92 x 122 cm



Fig. 27
92 x 61 cm



Fig. 28
102 x 81 cm

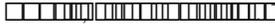
Steven Des Landes grew up in Southport, Lancashire, a place he likes to describe as  *small seaside town, very gentrified with elegant Victorian villas, eminently middle class. That was*  his sheltered world is often the setting for Steve's paintings. Ainsdale Beach, which runs along the coast to the south of the town is the backdrop to *Tender Balance*, its sand dunes that lead to the sea just visible in the background. This cosiness is the overall tension of the two figures, who sit with each other, almost indifferent to one another's company. There is a sort of metaphysical structure to this painting which is reflected in the overall balance of the picture plane: the iron, fence-like structure behind the two figures is offset by the vertical symmetry of the couple in front of it.



Fig. 29

 92 x 122 cm



Fig. 30

 122 x 150 cm



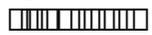
Fig. 31
183 x 183 cm



Fig. 32
102 x 76 cm



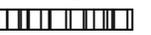
Fig. 33



61 x 76 cm



Fig. 34



122 x 122 cm



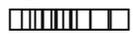
Fig. 35
102 x 102 cm



Fig. 36
Dreams & Desires
92 x 92 cm



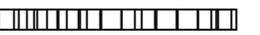
Fig. 37



80 x 100 cm



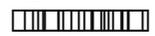
Fig. 38



56 x 91 cm



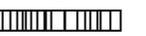
Fig. 39



61 x 61 cm



Fig. 40



108 x 82 cm



Fig. 43
76 x 76cm



Fig. 44
122 x 150 cm

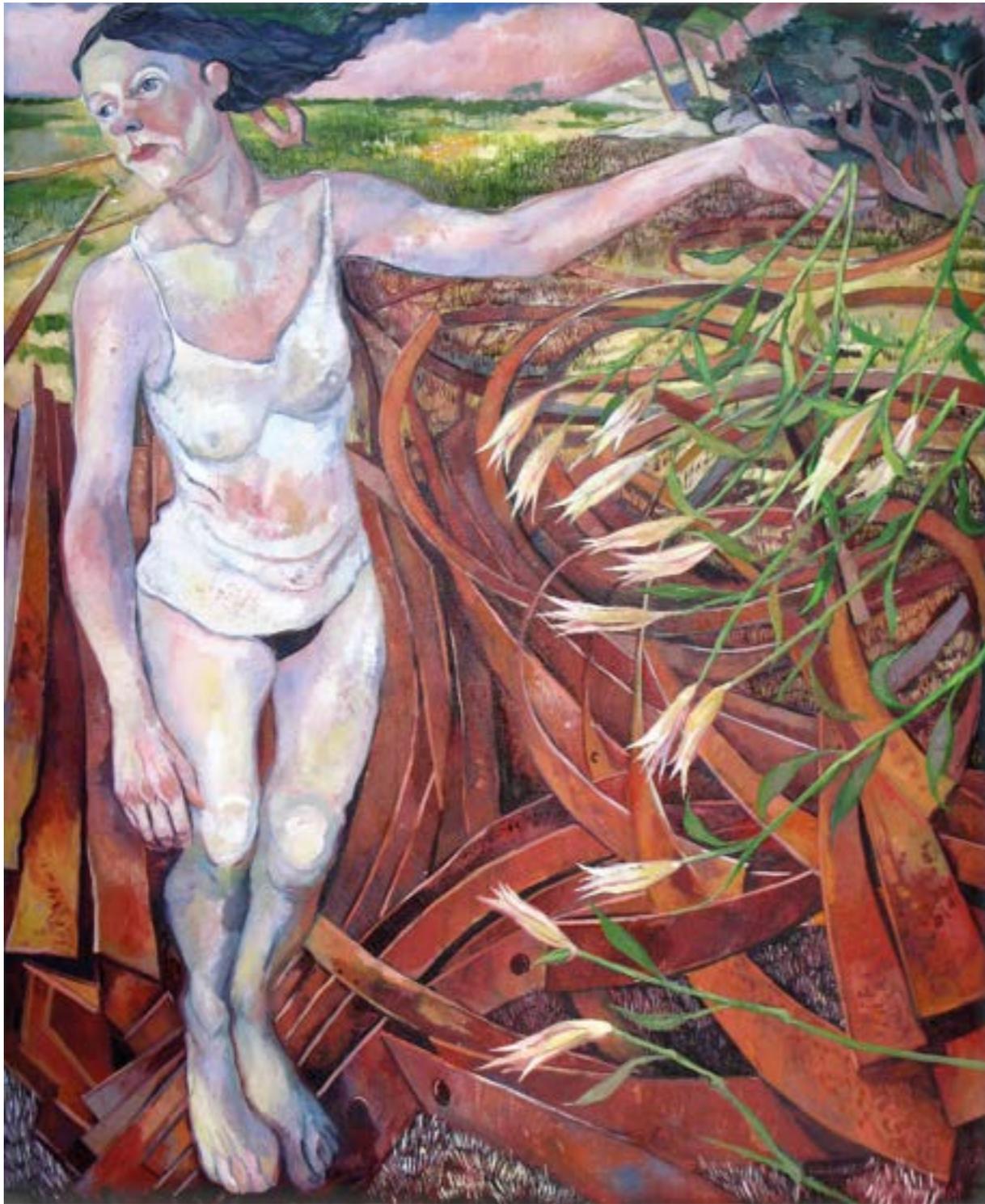


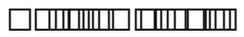
Fig. 45
122 x 150 cm



Fig. 46
61 x 61 cm



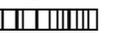
Fig. 47



92 x 92 cm



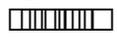
Fig. 48



61 x 63 cm



Fig. 49



88 x 92 cm

Index

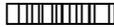
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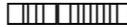
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