



**PATAKA** EDUCATION  
Art • Heritage • Culture

## Teacher Notes

### **Grahame Sydney: Down South, Recent Paintings 2001 – 2011**

**23 September 2011 – 6 February 2012**



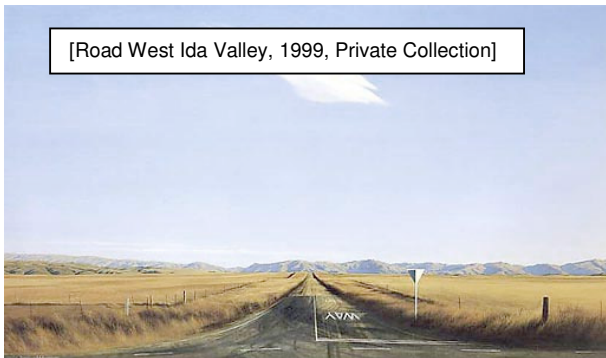
[September Burn St Bathans's, 2003, Private Collection]

Education resource compiled by Linda Fordyce, Educator, Pataka Museum of Arts and Cultures, 2011. Pataka Education programmes are supported by LEOTC (Learning Experiences Outside The Classroom) and funded by the Ministry of Education.

## Introduction

Grahame Sydney: Recent Paintings 2000 – 2011 is a survey of artist Grahame Sydney's work over the past decade. One of New Zealand's most iconic realist painters, Sydney is best known for his luminous, transcendent paintings of Central Otago where he lives in the Maniototo Valley.

In 2000 Pataka exhibited a survey of Sydney's work entitled *On the Road*.



[Road West Ida Valley, 1999, Private Collection]

Since then, he has visited Antarctica twice in 2003 and 2006; immersed himself in photography and film and successfully campaigned against Meridian's proposed wind farm in Central Otago. During this time he has managed to create a significant body of new work. This exhibition presents twenty six of

his recent works from 2001 to the present day selected from private collections throughout the country and shown together for the first time. \*

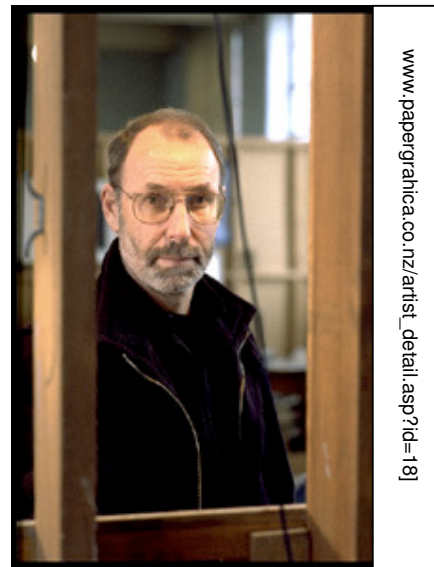
[\* *Down South* catalogue, Helen Kedgley]

## Biography: Grahame Sydney - Painter

Grahame Sydney was born in Dunedin in 1948. During school holidays he fell in love with Central Otago and would be driven to his favourite places where he would sketch and paint the dry vast expanses of land. After graduating from Otago University and Teachers' College, Sydney taught for a couple of years at Cromwell High School (1971-1972). Towards the end of 1972 he had his first solo exhibition at the Moray Gallery and then left New Zealand for a time spent in London and Europe. When he returned to Dunedin in 1974, he began painting full time and in 1975 he moved to Mount Pisa Station in Central Otago.

In 1978 he married Roslyn Nairn and began a year of tenure as the Francis Hodgkins Fellow at the University of Otago. The following year his daughter Melissa was born and then in 1981 his son Nicholas was born.

Renowned for his compelling images of the Central Otago region, he has become the definitive painter of its distinctive landscape, painting those landscapes that have particular meaning for him like the Dunstan Range, St Bathans and the Hawkdun Range. "I just love it in a deep and compelling way. I really don't need to be anywhere else."



www.papergrahma.co.nz/artist\_detail.asp?id=181

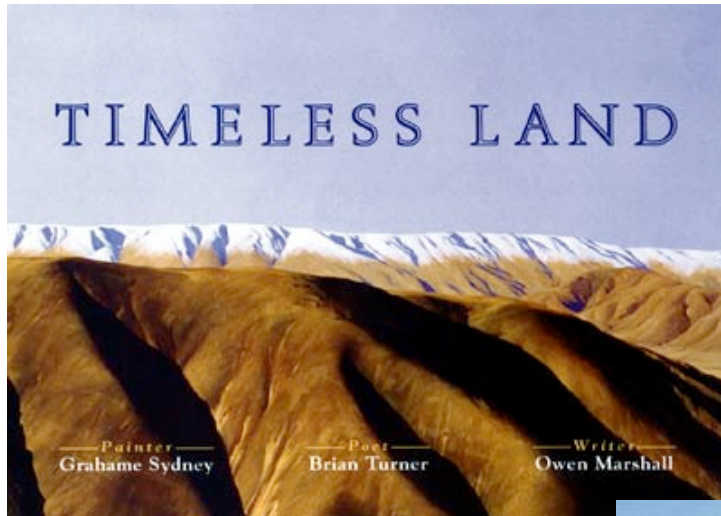
In 2003 and 2006 Sydney visited Antarctica as part of the *Artists to Antarctica* programme. He found it a beautiful place where the landscape was all about the absences or reductions of forms and the concealment of landscape under snow or mist. The Antarctica landscape was more difficult to sketch and Sydney began to work more with a camera to capture his landscapes. He produced a series of paintings on Antarctica as well as a book of photographs, 'White Silence, Grahame Sydney's Antarctica'. The experience in Antarctica led him to look at the Central Otago landscape with fresh eyes and he began a series of winter paintings of the landscape covered in snow and fog or hidden by darkness. 'Sydney's work has always been pervaded by a sense of silence and solitude' but the effect of the snow has heightened this feeling.



[Vince's Cross, 2006, Private Collection]

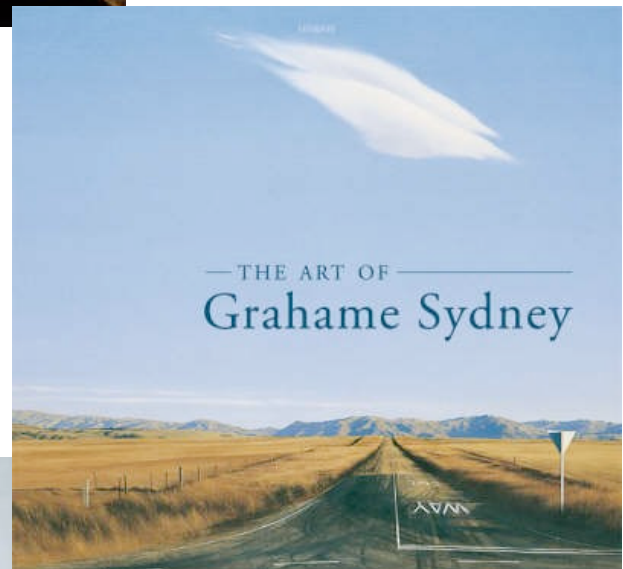
## Grahame Sydney - Author

Grahame Sydney has also produced a series of books which have helped to make his work some of the most accessible in New Zealand. Not many people can visit the Central Otago region today without referencing or looking for his paintings within the surrounding vistas. 'But no matter how familiar and often reproduced his work has become – the canvases remain as fresh and compelling as ever.'\*



Grahame Sydney; Brian Turner; Owen Marshall.  
First published 1995.  
Reprinted 2010 (5th reprint).  
Longacre Press. Hardback.  
**Awards:** New Zealand Pride in Print Awards (1996):  
Supreme Award for printing.  
Printing Industries of America (1996): Premier Print Award.

Grahame Sydney and contributors.  
First published 2000. Reprinted 2007 (4th reprint).  
Longacre Press. Hardback.  
**Awards:** Montana Book Awards (2000):  
Montana Medal for Non-Fiction; Illustrative Arts  
Category Award; Readers' Choice Award.



Grahame Sydney.  
Published 2008 by Penguin.  
Hardback. 75 photographs.  
**Accolades:** Shortlisted for BPANZ  
Book Design Awards 2009 (Random  
House NZ Award for Best Illustrated  
Book). Listed in NZ Listener's Top 100  
Books 2008.

## Grahame Sydney's techniques

Sydney gives us a created world not merely one that is recorded. People visiting Central Otago will never find the exact same site of one of his paintings. Sydney's work has always hovered between realism and abstraction." While he still makes preparatory drawings, he constructs his images in the studio, carefully editing and framing each view, reinventing, reducing landscape to its barest essence... Sometimes he foreshortens and flattens his images, distorting scale, creating spatial ambiguities."\*

Sydney works slowly and meticulously. His paintings are technically superb and take months to paint; 'my approach is slow and my technique is slow. I'm the long stare not the quick glimpse.' His paintings are usually oil on linen or panel and egg tempera.

Texture, form, tone, slanting shadows and dramatic light affects are important elements in his work, often done with a muted restricted colour palette. His vast vistas that seem to keep expanding beyond their frames are actually tightly structured compositions with low horizon lines, expansive skies and wide flat planes with an absence of figures.

Over the past decades certain motifs recur in his work – the corrugated iron and sun-bleached weathered boards of abandoned buildings, solitary trees, telegraph poles or letterboxes and road-signs that served as focal points. "In his more recent work Sydney has tended to get rid of almost everything in his paintings except the landscape."\* He has also recently painted the region in bitter winter covered with snow in contrast to his earlier paintings of Central Otago in the blistering heat of summer.



St Bathans Downs Road 1, 2010, Private Collection.  
[www.grahamesydney.co.nz](http://www.grahamesydney.co.nz)

\* Quotes used are taken from the *Down South* catalogue, Helen Kedgley – Curator of Modern Art, Pataka, 2011.



## Curriculum Links:

**Learning Areas** – Visual Arts DPK, DI, CI and UC  
English, Geography.

Learning Outcomes: Students will explore and use art-making conventions - analyze perspective, and investigate foreground/mid-ground/background in a hands on programme.

## PRE AND POST VISIT ACTIVITIES

CREATE a digital map of some of the locations of the landscapes

PHOTOGRAPH the effect of light on the landscape at different times of day where you live

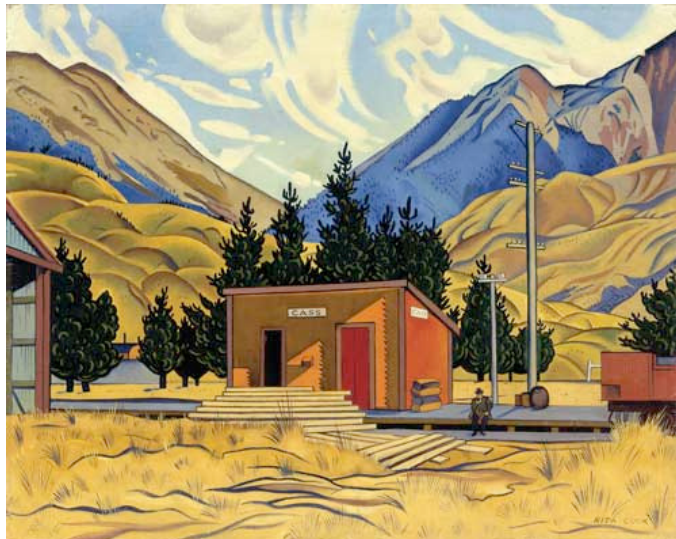
RESEARCH the environmental impact of wilding pines and/or wind turbines

DISCOVER the scientific names of the different cloud formations featured in Sydney's work

MAKE a viewfinder frame to isolate parts of the landscape to draw

PAINT monochromatic landscapes

COMPARE Sydney's work with the works of Rita Angus, Bill Sutton, Christopher Perkins and Rata Lovell-Smith



Cass c1936, Rita Angus, oil on canvas board,  
Christchurch Art Gallery

" The great purpose of landscape painting is to make us at home in our own country"

[from the exhibition of Algoma paintings (Group of Seven), Art Museum of Toronto, 1919]