



MUNDARING
ARTS CENTRE

PRINCEON

KATE HALLEN

19 JUL - 8 SEP 2019



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Three barriers prevented artist Kate Hallen from maintaining a close relationship with her now-departed grandfather - time, geographic distance, and illness. The illness in question was a series of symptoms indicating dementia, diagnosed in his final five years. In Hallen's once-yearly visits from rural New South Wales to Brisbane, she observed her grandfather's changing behaviour, often referencing stories from long before his granddaughter was born. In the artist's words, his "clearest memory which endured throughout was of a childhood with the family horse, Princeon. From this story, I learned that Princeon would help him and his brother Willy plough the snow and pull logs for firewood on the farm in Norway."

After his death, Hallen's encounter with her grandfather's stored away photographs helped bring her closer to the decades of his life preceding hers. She found images from the late 1930s of a modest-looking farmhouse, open fields, and a small boy on the back of the much spoken-of childhood horse. The images of the horse helped the artist overcome the obstacles of time and distance by providing more insights into where and when her grandfather had come from, and they also inspired several key works in this exhibition's suite of oil paintings.

As rendered in *April 9* (2019), Princeon was a pale muscular and dignified horse. In front of a dark, opaque background, the animal stands side-on, but

its neck turns to look around. The title carries strong meaning in Norwegian history as it marks the first day of Germany's occupation of Norway in 1940. Looking closely around the top of the painting, the artist has painted the faint but definitive outline of a warplane. The horse, with its head turned, suggests a not entirely knowing reaction to the new sound as the plane travels above.

Hallen's still life paintings aim to have the audience imagine what it might feel like to live with dementia. When the artist helped pack away many of her grandfather's items collected over the years, such as ship bells and other brass objects, she wondered about their significance. What is it? Why is it here?

For her grandfather, these objects held meaning, but for the artist, the objects had little or no context. Hallen imagined that this feeling was similar to her grandfather's experience as he lost memories of formerly familiar places, objects and people.

The paintings in *Princeon* operate to connect the artist and her grandfather - overcoming barriers of time and geography as well as dementia in the suit of still life paintings. Both of these strands in Hallen's work not only help the artist choose how to best remember her grandfather but also encourage empathy in all viewers.

Emily Wakeling



IMAGE CREDITS

Front: Kate Hallen, *April 9*, 2019, oil on canvas 84 x 106.5cm. Photo: Adam John Waters

Back: Kate Hallen, *Going back*, 2019, oil and charcoal on canvas 106.5 x 76.5cm. Photo: Adam John Waters

Back (Insert): Photo from Hallen family archive. Unattributed.

1. Kate Hallen, *eight bells*, 2019, oil on paper 38.5 x 55.7cm. Photo: Adam John Waters
2. Kate Hallen, *Unassumed*, 2019, oil on canvas 84 x 106.5cm. Photo: Adam John Waters
3. Kate Hallen, *I have lost you*, 2019, oil on canvas 106.5 x 83.5cm. Photo: Adam John Waters



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