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# Get to Know Tom Polo

Watch one of Sydney's most exciting artists painting live inside the Gallery of NSW.



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by SAMMY PRESTON

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Parramatta Artist Studios houses the workspaces of some of Sydney's brightest and most promising e artists. It's, unpredictably, on the second floor of an ordinary office building on Macquarie Street in Parramatta City. It is also the current studio home of painter, Tom Polo.

It's 40 degrees and rising on the day we visit, but, as with any office block, the studios are ice cold be the air-con is on. There's short grey carpet and fluorescent lighting, and the rooms overlook the busy blistering street below. As we move through the bureau-turned-studio, Polo assures me that the Arnot Assorted biscuit barrel is always reliably replenished.

"I see the studio as a site for problem solving," says Polo. One wall is lined with A4-sized paintings or Stacks of larger canvases rest in the opposite corner. "Because I don't paint or make work that is sequenced." in terms of completion, it becomes a process of erasure and redevelopment," he says. "And I think the what the studio is about for me - reassessing and reworking ideas."

While Polo has only been in this studio since December, he's had an enduring relationship with Parra Artist Studios - he entered the fold during its early stages. "When I graduated from art school I was le in the paper and I found an add for this studio that was just starting up. Michael Dagostino had just launched the initiative with Parramatta City Council," Polo says. "The artists here are acting as ambas for arts practice in western Sydney, but we also have the ability to be open to new and changing ideas

Polo's style is immediately recognisable - abstract portrait pieces rich with emotion, and bubble-shap prose in striking colours that can be at once emotive and ironic. "I'm interested in people, human relationships that come out of the way we interact, both in public and private spaces," he says. While portraiture forms a big part of his work, his paintings are never drawn from life. They're absorbed an compiled through experiences and encounters. "I think what is borrowed from life is a sentiment or that someone is embodying," he says.

Polo's repeated use of a particularly bright Yves Klein blue is alluring and familiar. He shrugs when I this blue holds some kind of significance. "Colour is so important to my work, but it's often only who people say something like that to me that I register those things. I think we resonate with certain cold even consciously."

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Over the past few years Polo's paintings have captured the attention and admiration of a discerning a His name has appeared on the bill for group shows at Melbourne and Sydney galleries such as STAT Sullivan+Strumpf, Gallery 9, Utopian Slumps, Artspace and Alaska Projects.

Polo has also attracted a wider audience through a series of intriguing outdoor projects. *All I Know* veseries of six text-based paintings on billboards set along the train line between Minto and Ingleburn sin Sydney's west. Commissioned by the Campbelltown Arts Centre in 2014, the six-part piece present sentence in fragments, "All I know is that we just keep doubting ourselves". "These projects were about widening audiences, or widening who sees art outside of a gallery space," says Polo. "It allowed other audiences to participate in the work. I'd travel on that train and hear people talk about it, which was amazing."

Polo is determined to continue to push the boundaries of painting and painting practice. Aside from the Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship in 2015, which will see him spend three months in Paris this year, Polo will also be live-painting a wall in the entry way of the Art Gallery of NSW in March. So his text-based pieces will also feature in a group show curated by Barry Keldoulis for Art Month in the Golden Age Cinema and Bar gallery space. The exhibition, *Green-eyed monster eating its own tail*, shows in which artists discuss the art world.

Green-eyed monster eating its own tail is open until March 20 at the Golden Age Gallery.

Tom Polo will be live painting at the Art Gallery of NSW as part of the Spectrum Now festival, everyonally 13 March. He'll present a talk on the project on Wednesday March 9 at 6pm at the AGNSW.

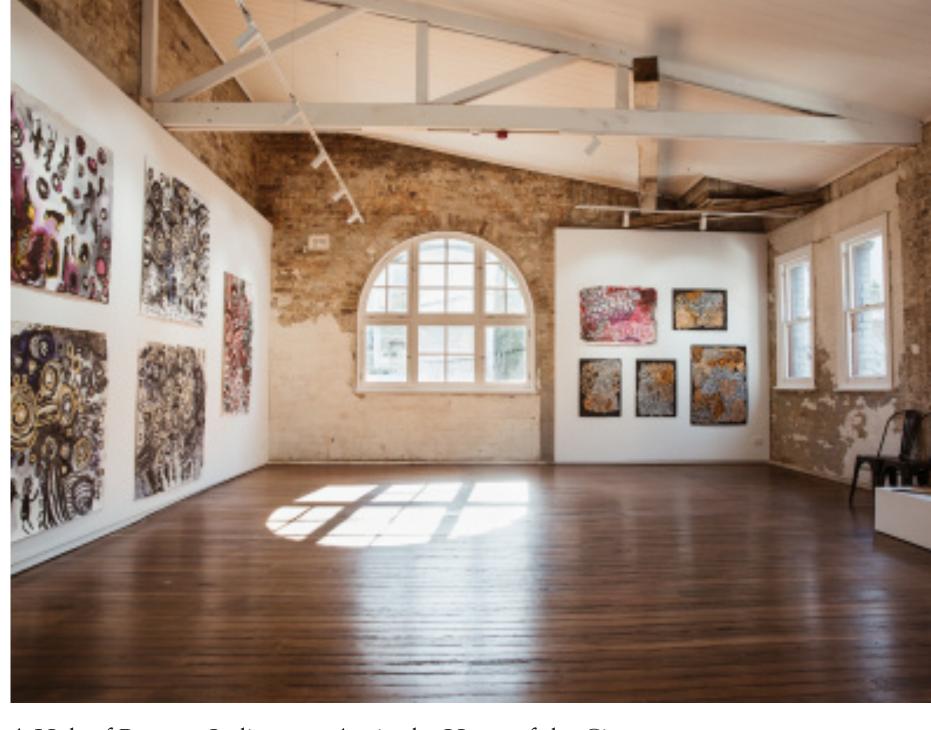
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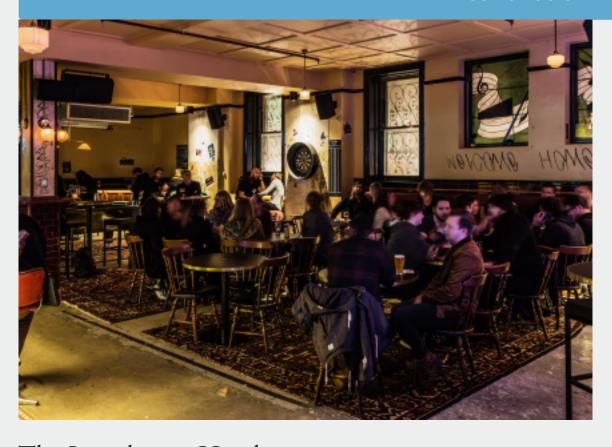
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