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# UNBROKEN

*Sophie Cape's unusual path to life as an artist is also her biggest asset.*



**Flying from thunder, roaring to rapture** (detail), 2018. Ash, pigment, acrylic, oil, bitumen, soil, salt, plant material on canvas. 137 x 200cm



Words  
Margaret Quilter

Artist  
Sophie Cape

Images courtesy of the artist

**A**n international ski racer turned national sprint cyclist, Sophie Cape pushed her body to the extreme until an irreparable injury altered her path. Turning to the artworld, Sophie's exploration became an outlet for her deep-seeded need for adrenalin, creating powerful pieces of work that grabbed the attention of John and Tim Olsen.

Sophie talks about her art and the influence her athletic career has had.

***When did you realise you wanted to be an artist?***

I always enjoyed art making but didn't become heavily involved until my career as an athlete was over. I needed a new challenge, one I could embrace wholly despite the brokenness of my body, and so I decided to attend art school. This transition proved extremely life altering. What may appear as disaster can lead you to something unexpected and I revelled in the way it revitalised my understanding of the world as well as that of my own capabilities.

***How have you developed your artistic career?***

Both John and Tim Olsen noticed me during my graduation from the National Art School. I was the recipient of a prestigious and eponymous drawing prize, which John had selected. Tim then invited me to show with him at his acclaimed gallery. Through their incredible support and belief in my work I have been able to develop my practice and have the opportunity to exhibit both here and overseas.

***Describe your style and how it has evolved?***

I suppose the works are considered to be abstract expressionist pieces – obviously with a very Australian identity. I see them as cathartic, psychological self-portraits and stories told by the materials I use. After I went out into the desert and began exploring a dynamic and physical approach, I was pushing myself again. I embraced the landscape and was excited by the lack of control I had due to the unpredictability of the outdoors. Against and with the elements, I started working on a large scale, beyond a comfortable reach. I developed the use of local found materials – soil for pigments, burnt trees as charcoal, bones to draw with, trees as brushes.

I camp out while the canvases are ravaged by nature for long periods of time. I try to get inside the works. Rather than trying to paint from the outside looking in, I focus on instinctual responses. I then bring the works back to the confines of the studio to meditate on. Refining this process, wrestling it, pushing it to extremes and pulling it back is all part of my ongoing evolution and quest for pure marks – for a degree of authenticity.

***What inspires your work?***

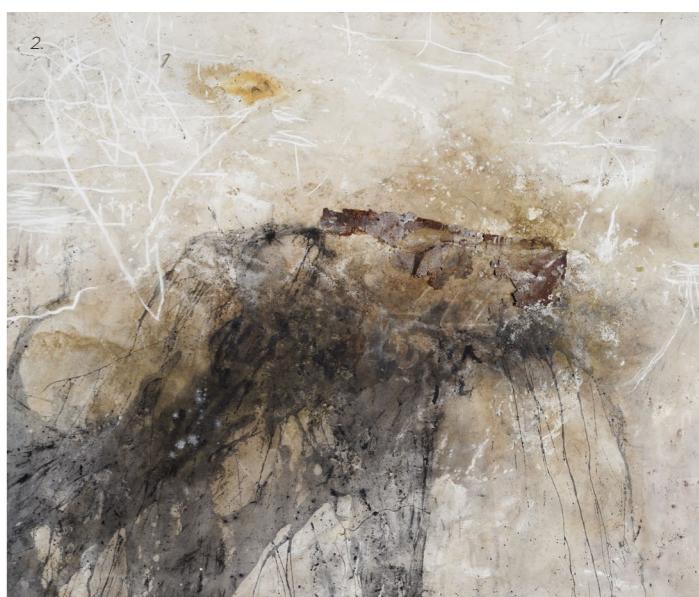
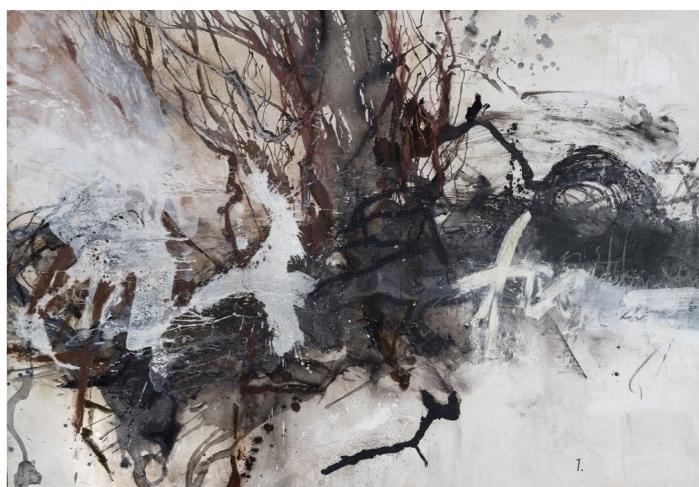
I believe that beauty does not exist without horror and that one cannot be truly appreciated without the other. This is the human condition. Through every work I try to find an exquisite balance between the two.

***How do you know when a work is finished?***

I suppose I have to say when it no longer annoys me! By that I mean when I have pulled all the elements together to some satisfaction while leaving them still breathing and alive.

***What's next for you?***

My latest show MAELSTROM opens at the Olsen Gallery on Nov 21. After that I will be setting my sights on an expanded international profile.



1. **Dawn had overthrown the dolorous dark**, 2018  
Charcoal, ash, ink, pigment, acrylic, oil, graphite, soil.  
163 x 198cm

2. **Till the golden seas break in crisp whispers at our feet**, 2018  
Charcoal, ash, ink, acrylic, oil, graphite, carborundum,  
salt, rust on canvas. 163 x 198cm

Left Page & 3. **Afraid of nothing, as though I had wings**, 2018  
Charcoal, ash, ink, acrylic, oil, graphite, carborundum,  
salt, butterfly wings, metal on canvas. 137 x 194cm