

## A GOTHIC NIGHT VISION

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Titles can play an important role in all forms of art, from eliciting the whole spirit of a composition – think of Vivaldi's *Spring* – through to capturing the spirit of an age, as in Tom Roberts' *Shearing the rams*. So the temptation can arise to assume that less clearly stated titles indicate less clearly declared aims and perhaps even less clearly directed organisation. However, this is far from the truth, as one of the recent acquisitions by the Art Gallery of Ballarat demonstrates. Andrew Browne's *#8 (in between days)* (2016–19) was originally shown in a 2016 exhibition at Tolarno Galleries in Melbourne and has since been reworked. The work bears the subtitle 'in between days', which was also the title of the exhibition and refers to a 1985 song by British Goth band The Cure.

The work's unassuming title belies the intensity of the artistic process and the artist's aim of giving tangible presence to a nocturnal world. Browne has spoken about his attraction to the shadows and darkness of the night but, of course, it is the interplay of light that allows for some perception of forms and space. So, in an extensive preparatory process using drawings and photographs, he composes his work to create an illuminated view of nature at night, one in which the realities of observation are abstracted and disrupted. He then translates it in oils on to a particular grade of linen canvas that he has selected for its ability to look almost photographic at first glance.

We then have a disjunctive layering of what appears to be a photograph on a background of starkly lit bare branches and twigs. It is in this contrast between the straightforward glimpse of nature at night and the 'photographic' image of a blurred tree trunk under different light conditions that the artist asks the viewer to pause and engage with our assumptions of what we see in a landscape. By taking the viewer beyond the immediate and the realistic, Browne's work suggests that there is a 'poetic resonance in the everyday'.<sup>1</sup>

Both Andrew Browne and writers have identified a Gothic strand in the artist's approach to the landscape and this is borne out by the reference in the subtitle of *#8 (in between days)* to the Gothic music of The Cure. There is certainly a sense of mystery in the work, and the darkness and the manner in which forms are illuminated create the sense that there is something beyond what we see. Arguably though, this is not a malevolent form of the Gothic but rather a richly poetic one, in which close observation allows the viewer to gain a sense of the uncanny in nature.

With this acquisition the Gallery builds further on its strong collection of Australian contemporary artists. Browne is a well-established Melbourne-based artist whose work has been widely exhibited over the last 30 years. His work is in the collections of the National Gallery of Australia, National Gallery of Victoria, Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, and the Art Gallery of Western Australia among many other galleries and museums. He was the winner of the 2016 Adelaide Perry Prize for Drawing and the Geelong Contemporary Art Prize in 2018.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Browne cited in Sara Sweet, Andrew Browne, *Glimpse*, Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney Australia, *Aesthetica*, 2015, <https://aestheticamagazine.com/andrew-browne-glimpse-martin-browne-contemporary-sydney-australia/>, accessed on January 4, 2022.

opposite: Andrew Browne *#8 (in between days)* 2016–19, oil on linen, 163.5 x 200.5 cm. Gift of Brent Harris through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2022. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ballarat. © the artist



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