

BEN QUILTY

Art Basel Hong Kong  
March 24 – 26 2016

Tolarno Galleries



**Ben Quilty**  
***After Afghanistan, Over the Hills and Far Away* 2015**  
Oil on canvas, 4 panels  
340 x 320 cm  
AUD \$130,000.00





**Ben Quilty**  
*Endlessness, Still Life 2015*  
Oil on polyester, framed  
80 x 70 cm  
AUD \$20,000.00





**Ben Quilty**  
***Stain painting no. 8 2015***  
**Oil on polyester, framed**  
**60 x 50 cm**  
**AUD \$18,000.00**

These new works by Ben Quilty reflect his restless approach to art making. The series of Rorschach paintings and works centered on soldiers returning from Afghanistan made the artist a household name, but Quilty is reluctant to continue making such works. Instead, he prefers to explore new subjects and new approaches. After a period of experimentation, a new body of work is now starting to emerge.

In the painting *After Afghanistan, Over the Hills and Far Away* 2015, Ben Quilty fuses potent, symbolic images with gestural markings to evoke an emotional state. He attempts to visualise this state on the canvas by allowing his mind and hand to operate (after a fashion) semi independently so that the serendipity of process leads his image making. The painting incorporates diverse elements, textures and imagery, a surreal mix that produces an unsettling atmosphere. Initially the painting suggests a narrative but closer inspection presents more questions than answers. The confusion of proportion and perspective fights against an easy narrative or logical interpretation, instead reflecting a vision shaped by emotion, like a dream or perhaps a nightmare.

This is a landscape coloured by memory, eroded and twisted by distance. If anything, it depicts a clash of cultures and the disturbed flow of human tide.

Ben Quilty, thinking of his time in Afghanistan, painted the ubiquitous kolba or family dwelling. This domestic symbol prompted him to consider the implications of the Taliban's return to power after the withdrawal of the Australian Defence Forces. Their resumption of control over Afghan society has pushed women back into their previous subservient role. Quilty worries that a new generation of women, bound by archaic rules and excluded from education, are being defined exclusively by gender, a sexualised body without a thinking head.

Above the body he has painted a disembodied head, and while it is not clear if the face is of an Afghan woman or the artist himself, the anguish is unmistakable. If a woman, the face betrays resignation and despair; and if the artist, the visage expresses a torn conscience. Was the intervention worthwhile? Has it benefited the people of the country? Australia has surrendered its responsibilities in Afghanistan: we visited then moved on so that it's now history, easily dismissed as over the hills and far away. Ben Quilty was there. He saw the erosion of a society. He judges himself as complicit.

#### TOLARNO GALLERIES

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