



/ ARTIST PROFILE /

COME FULL CIRCLE

Driven by an insatiable curiosity, **Gabrielle Pool** has long been carving out her own unique journey, with her artwork attesting to the faraway places and foreign influences she has encountered along the way. **Charlotte Middleton** writes.

At age five, **Gabrielle Pool** was made an example of in a way she will never forget. The kindergartner was proud of the wild scribble she'd produced during an *en plein air* drawing lesson, but her primary school teacher thought differently. "She scolded me in front of the kids and said, this is how *not* to draw a tree," Pool remembers.

Fast forward to the present, and the New Zealand-born landscape painter has come full circle, being named as a finalist in the Paddington Art Prize for Australian landscape painting for the past two

years. These days, Pool paints dreamlike, life-sized atmospheric landscapes in oils, "the kind you can walk into and disappear in," she says. She continues to capture the spirit and mood of landscape the way her famed scribble had sought to, but she has journeyed far and wide since.

Pool had a first formative cultural experience while attending school in Japan as an exchange student. Struggling with the language barrier, she turned to art as a means of expression and proceeded to stage her first solo show in the local council hall.

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Becoming somewhat of an anthropologist after her time in Japan, Pool's adventurous spirit propelled her to far-flung locations like China, the Bahamas, Greece, and Africa, where she exhibited and continued to evolve her practice. In 2004, she was invited to spend time immersed in the Hamar Tribe in Ethiopia, and so began the documentation of the vanishing tribes that was to become a central focus of Pool's practice.

The artist went on to immerse herself in tribal life with the Maasai of Kenya, explaining: "My painting has always been driven by a desire to preserve and record the history of ancient people and their environments, in a world that seems to be trying its very best to eradicate and civilise them," she says. She was subsequently invited by **Nelson Mandela** to contribute to the *Unity Series* alongside 20 other leading international artists, in a project launched at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland.



Living in Australia on and off for the past two decades, Pool more recently spent time among Anmatyerr women and children in Utopia (Alyawarre), northeast of Alice Springs. "It was here I took my first steps towards imaging and paying tribute to Australian Indigenous culture, sketching artists, working *en plein air*, painting their Country," she says.

Her practice has long been enriched by her itinerant existence, but it would seem Pool is starting to put down some more solid roots in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales.

"I am now painting in a studio nestled under a 400-year-old fig tree, getting my hobbit on," she says, having last year established her own art gallery in the heart of Byron Bay. As well as showcasing her own work, Peek Gallery hosts a dynamic program of contemporary exhibitions drawn from a selected group of established artists and emerging talent.

Pool has large-scale commissions held in private and public collections locally and internationally and has been a finalist in a number of art prizes. However, she has no intention of resting on her laurels: "I've been practicing as an artist for a few decades, but I feel I'm really just beginning to ripen now."

- 1 / Artist Gabrielle Pool in Casas Secretas, Byron Bay Hinterland with her work *Ghost of Bullrush*. Oil on canvas, 200 x 200cm.
- 2 / Gabrielle Pool, *The Corridor*, 2019. Oil on canvas, 180 x 120cm.
- 3 / Gabrielle Pool in Kibera, Africa. PHOTO: STUART MACLEOD.
- 4 / Gabrielle Pool, *In Serengeti*, 2021. Oil on canvas, 270 x 110cm.
- 5 / Gabrielle Pool, *Bamboo Looming*, 2019. Oil on canvas, 200 x 200cm.
- 6 / Gabrielle Pool, *Driving Home*, 2021. Oil on canvas, 100 x 150cm.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST

