

Compelled to begin this contemporary history painting when war broke out in the Middle East in July 2006, Jude Rae also used this painting's scale as an opportunity to explore a new, more liquid, painting technique. Israel was retaliating against a Hezbollah missile attack on border settlements by launching air strikes and artillery attacks on Lebanon, extensively damaging infrastructure and killing over a thousand civilians, and wounding many more. Jude Rae had arrived in France to take up the Moya Dyring Memorial Fellowship at the Cité Internationale des Artes directly from Dunedin where she had been painting large architectural interiors as the artist-in-residence there. She was planning to make similar studies in Paris, but coverage of the July war in the French media was extensive, and, absorbed by the imagery, she began to make drawings and watercolours of the conflict from the internet coverage.

Exhibiting the drawings in New Zealand on her return, over a year passed before she returned to one particular image which showed men standing on a hill overlooking Beirut airport, watching it burn. Body language evident in these figures compelled her, seeming to express the resignation and impotence of civilians everywhere in the face of military destruction. There was no credit for the image, so she has recreated the photographer as the figure on the left in her painting who holds up his mobile phone to capture the moment. Despite this and other obvious contemporary aspects of the original photograph, it had an atmosphere loaded with art history associations for her. In particular, it recalled the work of German Romantic Caspar David Friedrich whose quintessential painting shows a lonely figure gazing into the sunset, but also evoked the pageantry of Albrecht Altdorfer's *Battle of Alexander at Issus* (1529).

Jude Rae finally began to paint this large canvas early in 2009 in her studio in Canberra after returning from Madrid where she had been



*Jude Rae (b.1956), July 2006 2009, Oil and acrylic on linen. 2700 x 1950mm.*

studying the paintings of Diego Velázquez at the Prado Museum. There she had encountered American painter Cy Twombly's freely scribbled and calligraphic Lepanto cycle, first exhibited at the 2001 Venice Biennale, in the new section of the Prado alongside a Velázquez portrait.

Twombly's inspiration was the Battle of Lepanto, a famous conflict between the Papal alliance and Ottoman forces which took place off the coast of Spain in 1571. Whereas Velázquez had portrayed one of Phillip IV's buffoons in the guise of the commander of the victorious Papal fleet, Don Juan of Austria, Twombly had made this story of fire and fight into a huge twelve painting cycle. Ghostly boats drift across his giant canvases, the series beginning and ending with a conflagration. Using subtle tonal and chromatic variations in fluid colours, Twombly's paint is

applied in vertical "runs" and impasto smears as both a direct and metaphorical reference to water, blood, smoke and reflection.

Despite previously working with realism, in a very different tradition to Twombly, Jude Rae decided to emulate his flow of paint, trying for the same pooling and bleeding of colour and tone in order to break open the dominance of pictorial illusion in her large-scale paintings.

*July 2006* is an excursion into this territory, where the vertical runs of the acrylic paint create an energetic tension between the surface of the painting and the space depicted. Appropriately enough, this could also be understood as evoking the technological genesis of the screen image, which originates with the passage of data through the atmosphere.