

JAN NIGRO

Encounters & Journeys

A young girl enters Elam in 1936 and wins the prize for most improved figure work; she graduates in 1938. December 1945 her work adorns the cover of "The Arts in New Zealand". After World War II she settles for a time in Australia and in 1950 she is placed 5th equal with Fred William's in the inaugural Dunlop Australian Art Prize won by Sidney Nolan. In the same year the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, acquires her work. 1952 Auckland Art Gallery purchases a painting and goes on to add more of her work into the collection in the 1970s, as does the National Gallery (now Te Papa Tongarewa). Nigro is the first woman representative of the Committee of Management of the National Gallery 1970-73. Exhibiting with New Vision, Barry Lett, RKS galleries at the forefront of the dealer world. On the cover of the 1985 winter issue of Art New Zealand with a major survey of her work held at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. 1993 MBE for services to the Arts. Survey shows one at the Hawke's Bay exhibition centre honouring an artist who had lived in the Bay during the 1931 earthquake the other *A Portrait of Jan Nigro*, opened at the Portrait Gallery, Wellington 2001 and toured to the Rotorua Museum of Art and History 2002. Subject of a Mercury Lane Production documentary.

These are not the incidents in an artist's life, these are just a few from the list of ongoing achievements for a female artist who chose to focus on the figure in a male dominated and landscape centric New Zealand art world, which often looked offshore for impetus.

Throughout her career Jan Nigro has focused on the local, she is aware of trends and art developments overseas, but what interests her most is the human psyche. What was happening in the country and how were New Zealanders thinking about it? Her work is rich with subject matter from events that have galvanized public interest. There are the series on the World Wars; the 1970 murder of Jennifer Beard in South Westland (a young woman who was attacked and not found till days after her death, remaining still an unsolved case.); the Crewe Murders 1970; Whina Cooper's march to protest against Maori land loss in 1975.

Nigro is recognized for never shying away from sexuality in her subjects it is part of life and she has observed great changes from the restrictions of her youth to the 60s that reveled in sexual freedom. 1986 The Homosexual Law Reform Act was passed. The 1990s brought with it increased freedoms and acceptance. Yet despite this and centuries of the nude as a subject attitudes to depictions of the figure nude is strangely still a taboo subject. By the removal of clothes does the figure become vulnerable or empowered? Why is a female considered more acceptable as nude than a male? Nigro has said, 'Naked and nude: there is no difference between the naked and the nude, but the public thinks so. Clothes give people a period in time but when you strip them, the body is quite universal.'

It can be easy to forget the paths that Nigro has forged. When we remember to assess with the time period in mind and the world that she forged her art career in we find an artist who has stayed true to herself. Always looking for challenges, exploring new mediums, re-assessing her subject, observing, mindful of society's attitudes, faithful to the figure as her constant source of inspiration.

She has rightly been acknowledged as of one of our most prominent female figurative painters. Ron Brownson suggests this is because she has a "*huge heart for the truths within other's lives*" and describes her as "*one of New Zealand's bravest and insightful artists.*"

Her work is her testament; it is rich with humanity, full of life.



Jan Nigro
Cafe Girl ca. 1950s
 Oil on board
 1040 x 385 mm
 Signed



Jan Nigro
Head 1956
 Wash on paper
 490 x 370 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Dwarf 1964
Brush drawing on paper
515 x 300 mm
Signed, titled & dated

She has the remarkable faculty of being able to seize on the most fleeting moment, the most fugitive expression, to make it permanent while retaining the subtle sense of evanescence.

Lawrence Thomas, an Australian reviewer
(later Director of the Queensland Art Gallery)



Jan Nigro
The Entertainer 1964
 Brush drawing on paper
 550 x 327 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Girl 1963
 Brush drawing on paper
 475 x 360 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Children of the Pioneers 1964
 Oil on board
 600 x 465 mm
 Signed & dated



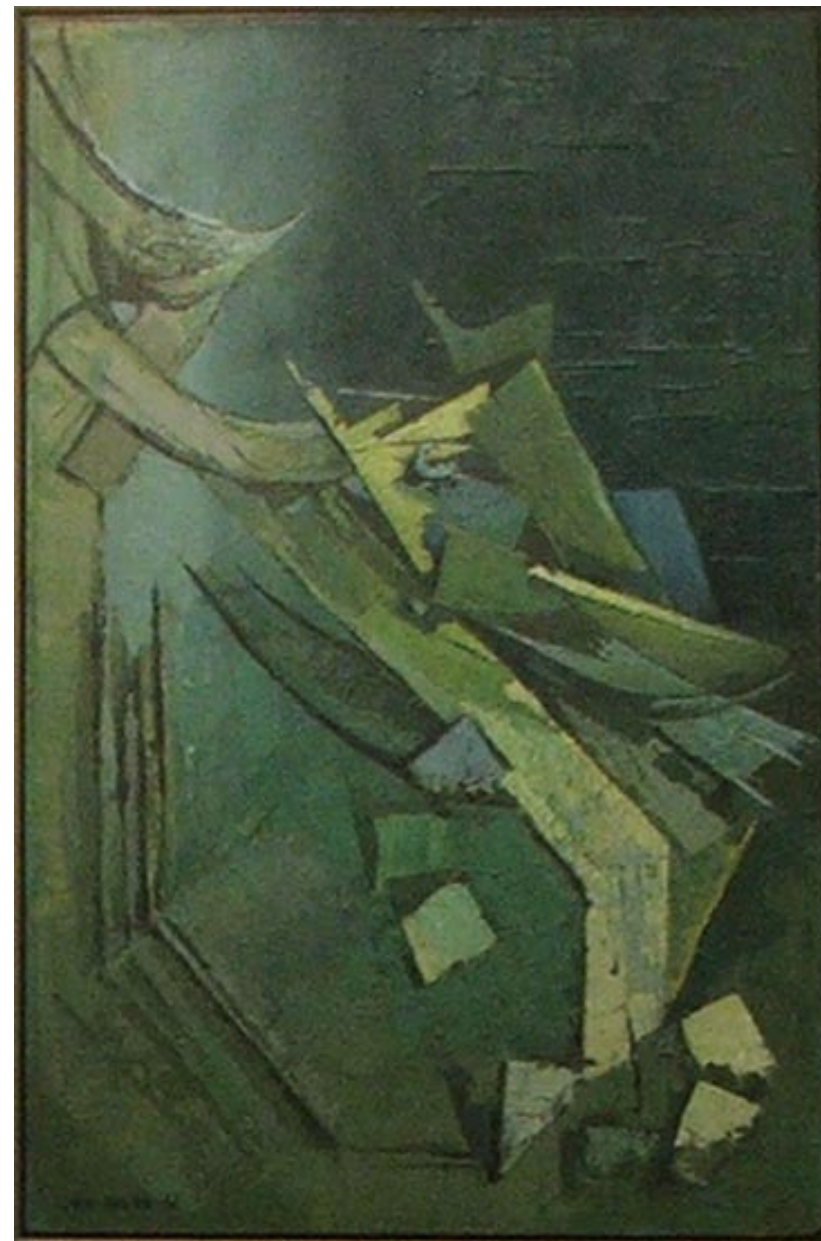
Jan Nigro
Abandoned Mine III 1964
 Oil on board
 575 x 985 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Fault lines, Rotorua 1956
 Wash on paper
 380 x 445 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Fault lines, Rotorua 1956
 Wash on paper
 433 x 380 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Debris from the Sea 1966
 Oil on board
 810 x 1215 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Mining Baroque 1964
 Oil and mixed media on board
 600 x 900 mm
 Signed & dated

Jan Nigro
Mining Baroque 1964
 Mixed media on paper
 375 x 565 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Disintegration of a Model T Ford 1964
 Oil and mixed media on board
 568 x 870 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Bathers 1966
 Pastel, pencil and wash on paper
 465 x 510 mm
 Signed & dated

Nigro says of her Australian Bathers, "These Bathers, from 1964 to 1968 gave me a breathing space for time and contemplation, even experimentation, while other ideas gained force and took over. They were light, abandoning themselves to innocent pleasures; sunbathing, swimming and playing beach games along the Gold Coast beaches. The drawings are spontaneous. I didn't use models, I wanted to capture the sheer exuberance of living."

John Daly-Peoples, exhibition essay for *At the Beach*, North Art, 2003



Jan Nigro
Bathers, 1968
 Wash on cardboard
 620 x 490 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Sonny, *Portrait of a Maori Man* 1967
Charcoal on paper
465 x 295 mm
Signed & dated



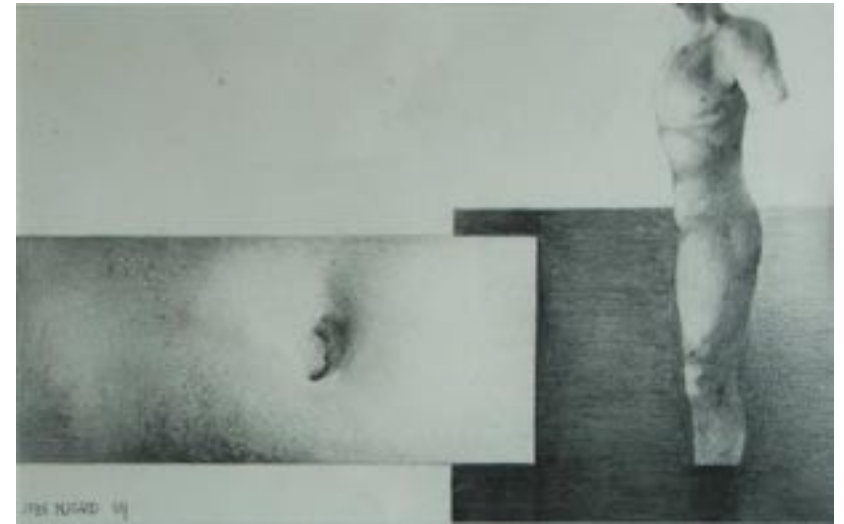
Jan Nigro
Beach Play 1967
Watercolour and pencil on paper
455 x 495 mm
Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Summer Encounter ca1977
 Oil on canvas
 780 x 920 mm
 Signed & dated

... a few painters have examined patterns of social behaviour and the mores of society. In other words, explored the topographic of the psyche rather than that of the land.

From *Four Humanists* a chapter in Gill Docking's *200 Years of New Zealand Painting* about Bryan Dew, Garth Tapper, Michael Illingworth and Jan Nigro.



Jan Nigro
Summer Encounter 1969
 Pencil on paper
 320 x 500 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Summer Encounter 1970
 Oil on canvas
 350 x 635 mm

Nigro's *Encounter, Haast Bridge*, was developed after reading the newspaper accounts of the "tragic story of Jennifer Beard, a young English schoolteacher whose body was found under Haast Bridge." The event felt close to home as her own daughter was hitchhiking around the country at this time.

Hamish Keith reviewer for the Auckland Star aptly described them as *challenging* and wrote, *The specific event is only a guide, I think, to the intention of these drawings. There is no hint in them of any actual event. There is, however, more than a hint of the sinister polarity to the life and fertility symbolism they suggest at first. On the other side of this particular coin are violence and death. This is, of course, an uncomfortable notion but it says a great deal for Jan Nigro's skill that her drawings can confront us so impressively with the idea without being banal or gross.*

The sense of sinister mystery gets deeper in the 'Encounter Haast Bridge' series. Here there is no watcher, just the female body and the dark moving in..... No violence is displayed but as in the 'Summer Encounter' series, over mastering forces are implied. This is a small exhibition whose power quite transcends its size and even the medium used.

T.J. McNamara NZHerald Reviewer.



Jan Nigro
Haast Bridge 1970
Pencil on paper
238 x 380 mm
Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
The Victim 1970
Pencil on paper
250 x 370 mm
Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
The Analyst makes an Assessment 1971
 Pencil on paper
 310 x 490 mm
 Signed & dated

*The drawing is of an analytical concept.
 The woman undressing, and the analyst keeps his identity.*

Jan Nigro.



Jan Nigro
Woman in Protective Clothing 1973
 Watercolour & pencil on paper
 500 x 360 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
In the Public Gardens 1971
 Pencil and wash on paper
 447 x 334 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
In the Public Gardens 1971
 Pencil and wash on paper
 440 x 340 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
In the Public Gardens #2 1971
 Pen and wash on paper
 450 x 810 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
In the Public Gardens 1971
 Watercolour and ink on paper
 330 x 440 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Silent Departure 1972
 Pencil and watercolour on paper
 450 x 632 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Re-Union 1972
 Pencil on paper
 300 x 420 mm
 Signed & dated

In the ANZAC SERIES I wanted to make a comment about going back to old wars. I had always regarded dawn parades as a waste of time and thought reunions as an excuse for drinking and maudlin sentiments but I haven't been to war and I hadn't seen Gallipoli. I had no alternative but to go back there through my father's memories, and to visit the library at the Auckland Museum hoping to come to an understanding. There I found Gallipoli Dairy written by Sir Ian Monteith. My own thoughts on war were galvanised by his comment: "No battle ground so easily lends itself to retrospective sentimentality by reason of the beauty of the setting, the grandeur of the theme and the unhappiness of its ending. Gallipoli will always rank amongst the world's classic tragedies."

Jan Nigro, *Apple for the Teacher*, 1996.



Jan Nigro
Haversack 1971
Pastel and watercolour on paper
710 x 455 mm
Signed & dated

Like the 'Pioneer' paintings the 'Anzac' works are at several removes from historical events. ... the artist creates an aura of unreality and estrangement which underlies the contemporaneity of her perspective.

Priscilla Pitts, Art New Zealand, Winter 1985.



Jan Nigro
Lynn and camera 1976
 Pencil on paper
 623 x 510 mm
 Signed & dated, from the series *City People*



Jan Nigro
Lynn and camera 1976
 Pencil on paper
 660 x 475 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
City Girl 1977
Pencil on paper
540 x 330 mm
Signed & dated

I was looking at the shifts and reversals of socially defined male and female roles.

Jan Nigro on her 1970s' series *City People*, *In the Public Gardens*, and *The Analyst*.



Jan Nigro
Wide Boy 1973
 Pencil on paper
 530 x 560 mm
 Signed & dated



►
 Jan Nigro
Tweed Coat III, Man from the City 1973
 Watercolour and pencil on paper
 500 x 550 mm
 Signed, tiled and dated
 Signed & dated.

►
 Jan Nigro
Tweed Coat, Man from the City 1971
 Pencil on paper
 480 x 630 mm
 Signed & dated





Jan Nigro
Little Man 1971
 650 x 375 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Woman on the Beach 1974
 Watercolour, pencil and collage on paper
 430 x 580 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Impressions of Two Strippers 1972
 Pencil on paper
 555 x 734 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Suzy and the Land 1977
 Mixed media on paper
 590 x 510 mm

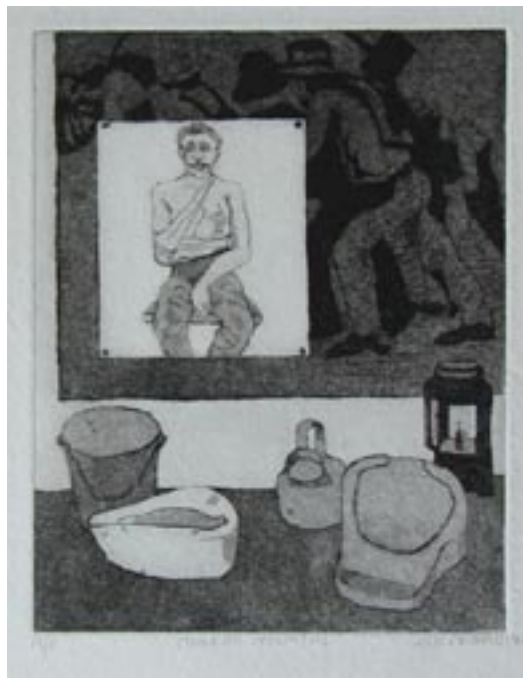


Jan Nigro
 "SUZY"

Name: Huihana Dawn (Suzy)
Date of Birth: 6.6.40
Place of Birth: Haupai, Kaipara
Sex: Female
Race: Maori
 Ngapuhi/Ngati-Whatua

*I asked Suzy if her sisters approved of the exhibition.
 Yes but it took them awhile to come to terms with it.
 You mean the nudity?
 Yes. They were amused at the texture of my back in the photograph. They said they could see goose pimples. They wanted to know why you have only shown my back in the land series.
 Suzy, your people in those days were part of the land. When the Pakeha arrived you were forced to turn around and confront them.
 What did your sisters think of the city series?
 Suzy was silent for a time.
 They said to me, Suzy, you have your freedom. You are free to do as you please!*

Jan Nigro *Apple for the Teacher*, 1996.



Jan Nigro
Miners' Hospital 1986
 Etching, artist's proof
 253 x 200 mm
 Signed, titled & dated



Jan Nigro
Hill End 1986
 Etching, artist's proof
 251 x 200 mm
 Signed, titled & dated



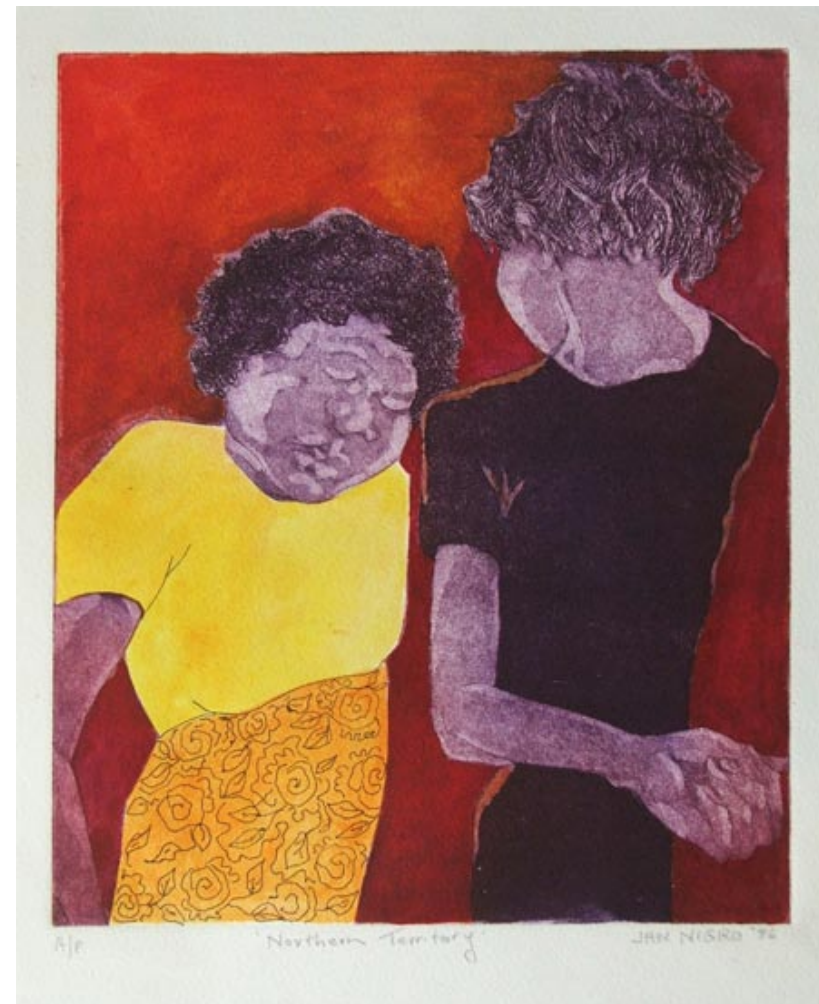
◀
 Jan Nigro
Ward's Blue Store, Charters Towers 1982
 Oil on canvas
 815 x 1120 mm
 Signed. & dated

Australia has remained important to Nigro since 1948 when she moved to live there for a time. She would travel back often invigorated by the acceptance of the figure there and stimulated by the colours of Australia.

In 1982 she and her husband visited Queensland and stayed at Charters Towers. In 1986 Nigro visited Hill End, another old mining town, not far Bathurst, and popular with artists. Russell Drysdale, Donald Friend, Brett Whiteley had all painted there. Later in Sydney she would use her drawings of Hill End as subjects for etchings.



Jan Nigro
Room Down the Line 1980
 Mixed media on board
 417 x 510 mm
 Signed



Jan Nigro
Northern Territory 1986
 Etching, artist's proof
 292 x 252 mm
 Signed, titled & dated



Jan Nigro
Train Driver 1980
 Mixed media on board
 423 x 450 mm
 Signed



Jan Nigro
Woman with Cockatoo 1985
 Oil on canvas on board
 410 x 615 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Woman with Black Crow 1985
 Oil on board
 600 x 720 mm
 Signed & dated



◀
 Jan Nigro
The Woman who saw Ghosts 1986
 Etching, artist's proof
 297 x 253 mm
 Signed, titled and dated.

"I have had many years being frustrated in the lack of interest in the figurative."

Jan's right: We all know that figures can be scary in visual art, especially when they reach out to us and jolt us with what it means to look closely at the body.

We have two terms for looking at the figure: the gaze. We know that there is a male gaze and a female gaze and that they are not the same way of seeing.

To look at the body is to be its spectator.

We take pleasure in looking at other people particularly if they are unclothed.

Jan noted to me: "Naked and nude: there is no difference between the naked and the nude, but the public thinks so. Clothes give people a period in time but when you strip them, the body is quite universal."

Ron Brownson, guest speaker, North Art exhibition, 2003.



Jan Nigro
Bathers II 1986
Oil on canvas
1230 x 900 mm
Signed & dated.



Jan Nigro
Lance 1985
Watercolour on paper
405 x 350 mm
Signed, titled & dated.

Nigro joined the life drawing sessions at the Catherine Mitchell Society, on Waiheke. Locals would pose and often becoming models for later suites of work and in the process become friends.



Jan Nigro
Symbols and Textures 1996
 840 x 1070 mm
 From the Ports of Auckland Series
 Signed & dated

*Male vulnerability, gender overlapping, different moods
 in male iconography – these are subjects that
 interest me.*

Jan Nigro 2007.



Jan Nigro
I have this passion for happy endings 2004
 Oil on canvas
 755 x 550 mm
 Signed & dated



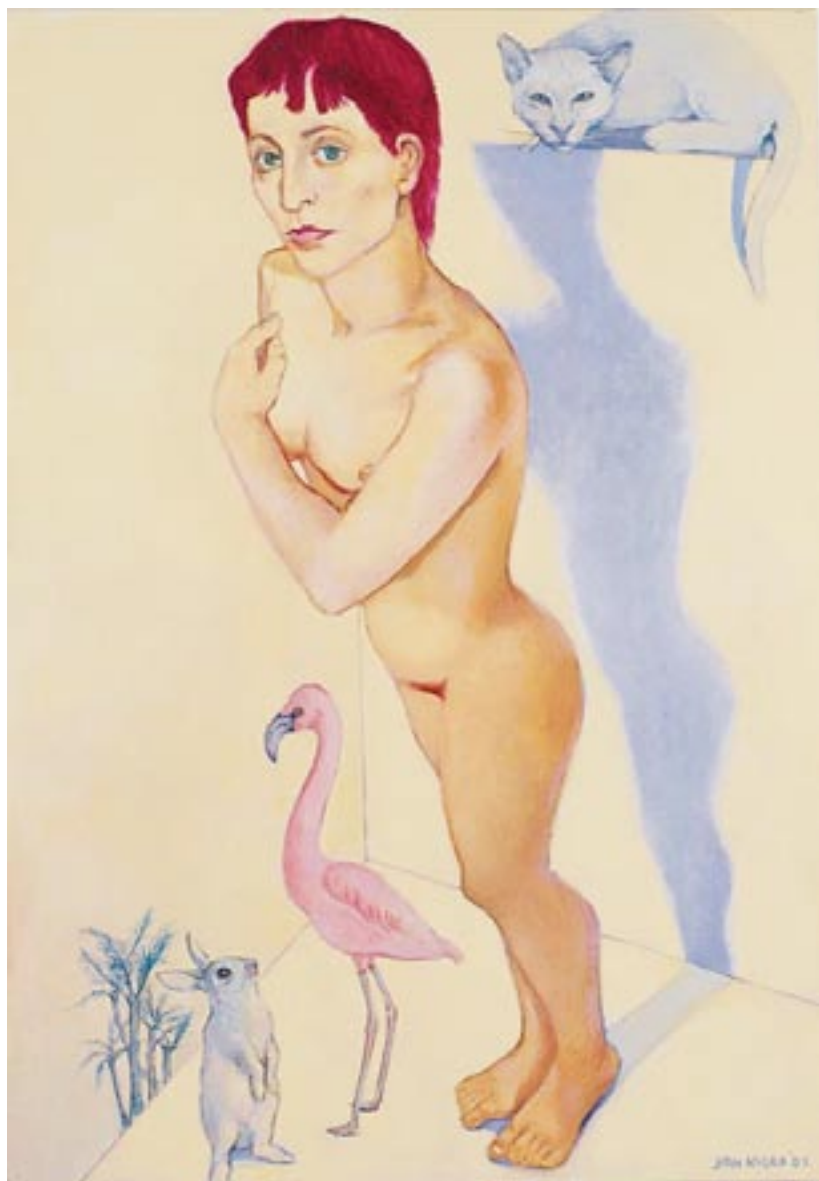
Jan Nigro
Guys and Dolls 1998
 Oil on canvas
 845 x 1130 mm
 Signed



Jan Nigro
Red 1999
 Oil on canvas
 1120 x 790 mm
 Signed & dated

Red is a colour that shouts, and the image is doing that in a raunchy celebration 'Ecco Homo' – behold the man.

Jan Nigro 1999.



Jan Nigro
Alice leaves wonderland 2002
 Oil on canvas
 1010 x 710 mm
 Signed

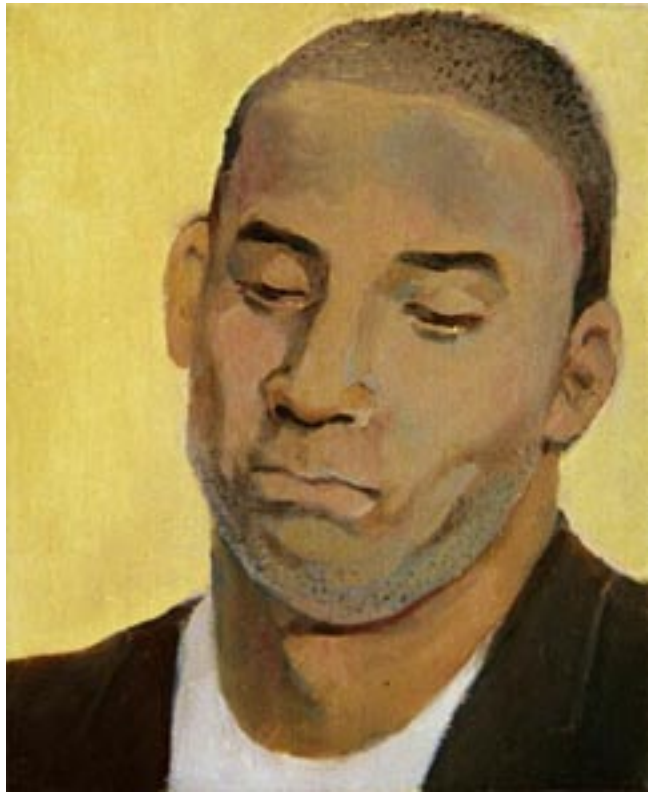


Jan Nigro
Who stole the tarts? 2001
 Oil on canvas
 360 x 710 mm
 Signed

Alice, was a young kiwi woman who had posed for the drawing group. Nigro asked if she would pose for her and developed her *Aspects of Alice* series around this young woman off on her OE. With the chaos in the world at the time, September 11, war, Nigro saw New Zealand as wonderland, and showed Alice learning to understand herself and the world through her travels.



Jan Nigro
Alice and the Two Queens 2001
 Oil on canvas
 350 x 710 mm
 Signed



Jan Nigro
Even Heroes Cry 2004
 Oil on canvas
 300 x 250 mm
 Signed

There was always a certain waywardness in Nigro's work from the beginning. Sexual ambiguousness, off beat eroticism pop up repeatedly with Nigro happily switching male and female roles.

David Famularo, Wellington reviewer 2001.



Jan Nigro
Sad Movies Make me Cry 2004
 Oil on canvas
 296 x 505 mm
 Signed



Jan Nigro
Are you jealous? 2004
 Oil on canvas
 350 x 550 mm
 Signed

RECENT WORKS ON PAPER

I have always enjoyed working with the nude as subject matter and in this latest series I looked back to the 1960s when I did some partly abstracted figures of bathers and after all these years I have a yearn to go back to them in a different context.

Heightening colour is like putting more energy into the nude and I wanted to add a sense of the climatic change that is affecting our world into these works on paper.

Jan Nigro 2010.



Jan Nigro
A Conversation on the Beach, 2010
Inks & acrylics on paper
500 x 410 mm
Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Heat Wave 2009
 Inks & acrylics on paper
 510 x 406 mm
 Signed & dated



Jan Nigro
Woman returning to climatic balance (Persephone & Pluto) 2009
 Inks & acrylics on paper
 485 x 394 mm
 Signed & dated



◀
 Jan Nigro
Boys in a Landscape 2010
 Inks & acrylics on paper
 500 x 410 mm
 Signed & dated

For information on artworks and price contact :

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