



Joshua Yeldham perched on the cliffs of Mount Lidgbird at 400 metres, sketches the scene beyond.

ART

Tangled up in blue

Cast away to luxury retreat Capella Lodge on Lord Howe Island to initiate its first artist-in-residence program, artist Joshua Yeldham revelled in the splendour of the landscape, inspiring new works for an upcoming exhibition. By Cushla Chauhan.

PHOTOGRAPHS JO YELDHAM

WHEN HAYLEY AND James Baillie launched their first-ever artist-in-residence program at Capella Lodge on Lord Howe Island earlier this year, the Australian artist they most wanted to inaugurate it was almost literally at their doorstep.

Joshua Yeldham is famed for his powerfully evocative, mesmerising and emotive artworks that pay homage to the natural world. He also happens to share the same postcode as the Baillies, and along with his wife Jo and their two children, has become good friends with the couple and their four boys over recent years.

"Both our families live on Pittwater in Sydney and share a love of its waterways and our surrounding natural environment," says Hayley. "Josh's ability to take what he feels in nature and communicate that in an intricate way to the viewer is something that connected us to his work. We were excited by the idea of having him on Lord Howe Island with his wife Jo, a photographer, to document the adventure."

While Joshua's work conveys his reverence for nature, Capella Lodge, off the coast of New South Wales, is a canvas for Hayley and James's passion for it. Like the trio of other high-end properties in their Baillie Lodges portfolio – a collection of boutique lodges they founded – Capella is designed to tread lightly on the Earth and allows guests to fully immerse themselves in the environment.

Each year, an established Australian artist will be invited to spend five to seven nights at Capella Lodge, using it as base from which to explore the World Heritage-listed island famed for its diverse subtropical landscape and unique flora and fauna. In return, that artist will donate sale proceeds from a work inspired by their stay to a charity they care deeply about.

"Josh and I had been to Lord Howe Island when our children were little and we were very taken by the majestic landscapes," says Jo. "When the opportunity came to spend more time, just the two of us, to explore and stay at Capella on the south of the island under Mounts Gower and Lidgbird, and to have access to hike the longer trails, we were very excited."

Arriving in March for their eight-day stay, the couple fell into an easy flow. From their suite, embracing vistas of lagoon, sky and mountain, they could hear the low roar of the sea and songs of abundant birdlife. At sunrise, mists that drifted from Mount Gower, the isle's highest peak, cleared as the sky opened up. "Sunlight set the daily rhythm," says Joshua. "We'd rise early and I'd carry the paper on one of the many trails where I'd set up for a time while Jo would wander away with her camera." →



One of the artist's new works, Mt Gower - Lord Howe Island (2020).

Memories relayed by the pair are gently poetic. Joshua recalls ferns heavy with droplets, swooping seabirds, emerald ocean and a winding trail leading to a rainforest gully where ancient fig trees with gigantic buttress roots reigned.

Jo too, was struck by those old-age trees: "I watched Joshua paint, in indigo ink, an old fig tree that stretched and dropped its anchors into the fertile soil as we walked above beaches edged with coral reef, which at high tide the evening before we had swum in with green turtles and an abundance of kingfish that nibbled our toes," she shares.

Although he arrived prepared with tools – brushes, ink and sheets of thick recycled linen paper, large enough to capture the grand scale of the mountains – Joshua was unimpeded by a prescribed

plan, allowing his art to take shape organically. "I tend to love mystery," he reveals. "I think after 25 years it keeps my instincts alive. I'm still beholden to the process and don't really dominate the practice; I allow it to keep leading me as if I'm searching or seeking."

Photographed by Jo as he painted by a waterfall, Joshua explains how he surrendered to the moment. "The mist from the waterfall was landing all over the paper and I used that energy of the work constantly collapsing and expanding in front of me," he says. "I loved that adjunct where I had to keep adapting my mark-making as the raindrops keep altering the picture."

Beyond its physical beauty, the island was also a source of intoxicating energy, a factor that also informed the artist's process.



Yeldham carrying supplies on the Malabar Hill walk, gazes back to the south of the island.



Above: at Capella Lodge with an artwork in progress featuring Mount Lidgbird. This image: stopping to sketch among the fig tree roots.



On the way to Ball's Pyramid over the clear water of the lagoon.

"The scale of the mountains is a volcanic energetic surge that you feel while there"

"The scale of the mountains is a volcanic energetic surge that you feel while there," Joshua reflects. "It's a steep, steep landmass and you feel like you're on a powerful kind of tectonic plate."

While relaxing into the pace of the island allowed Joshua to dedicate himself to his practice, it's in his Sydney studio that his artworks are being completed. In addition to the "kind of rainy works" that sprung from the waterfall, the artist is also breathing life into pieces inspired by a "beautiful washed-up tree" found on a beach as well as the magnificence of Mount Gower itself.

Capella Lodge's first artist-in-residence will culminate in an art exhibition held in November where Joshua will reveal his new collection. As promised, a painting from the show will be donated and used to fund an education module for Cool Australia, a not-for-profit founded by Joshua's friend Jason Kimberley that helps educators engage young learners in the area of environment. "I try to encourage nature as our teacher, the great adapter, the shape-changer," says Joshua. "By linking Cool Australia with Lord Howe Island scientists, we hope to develop a learning platform that explains how extraordinarily pristine this island is."

Gifted with the opportunity to create artwork with altruistic intent and highlight the significance of this precious habitat was joyful in itself, but the couple also were grateful for the privilege of being able to create without thought of time, unfettered by everyday responsibilities. "I think that's why the word retreat is so valuable," offers Joshua. "It allows the artist a break from duties that sometimes add weight to the freedom that was granted us to just wander through nature and create."

Joshua Yeldham's new exhibition, Providence, opens November 3 at Arthouse Gallery, Sydney. Go to www.arthousegallery.com.au.

JO YELDHAM



Drift Wood - Lord Howe Island N 1/1 (2020) will be on display at Yeldham's upcoming exhibition.