

Goulburn Regional Art Gallery presents...

3 feb. — 18 mar.

# Julian Meagher

## *The Green Ray*



Art Trail



## About the Art Trail

This Art Trail has been developed for the exhibition *The Green Ray* by the Gallery's Education Officer, Kirsten Jeffcoat. Jeffcoat is an experienced Visual Arts Teacher with degrees in Education and Visual Arts with a Masters from the University of Paris VIII. She has taught at Primary, High School and Tertiary institutions including the Sorbonne University in France. Jeffcoat has worked as Education Officer at the NCA and the National Gallery of Australia and is also a practicing artist.

This educational resource includes practical and theoretical activities for all ages and can be used before or after visiting the Gallery.



Julian Meagher. Image courtesy: Niki Gudex and Yuvuz Gallery.

## Julian Meagher's *The Green Ray*

The exhibition *The Green Ray* by Sydney-based artist Julian Meagher is a return to his earliest subject matter of land and sky. It features a new body of work including large scale paintings and a light installation which creates an immersive and changing viewing experience. Continuing his fascination with atmospheric optical phenomena, the exhibition references a light effect sometimes visible on an unobstructed distant horizon at sunset and sunrise, the 'green ray'. This occurrence is fleeting and so uncommon that it retains a mythic status.

In this new body of work, Meagher draws on memories of treasured family holidays in Kialla, NSW, the site of the artist's formative connection to the environment. The depictions of the natural world are laden with personal histories and nostalgia. Meagher explores the unrelenting and cyclical passage of time, shown in the changing quality of light throughout the day or capturing a precious passing moment of a child sleeping. *The Green Ray* plays with hyper-romantic links between nature and feeling, real and unreal. What seems ephemeral can instead be something enduring, revealed to us in glimpses.



Julian Meagher *The Green Ray*, Goulburn Regional Art Gallery. 2023. Credit: Silversalt Photography

# Exhibition Vocabulary and Find-a-word

## Vocabulary

sublime , hyper-romantic, emotional landscapes, minimal, physical, gestural, smearing, blending, dragging, scrubbing, stillness.

## Find-a-word

Get to know a little more about the exhibition by finding some of the descriptive words listed in the find-a-word below.

LANDSCAPE

PORTRAIT

MEAGHER

PAINTING

LIGHT

OIL

CONTEMPORARY

INSTALLATION

LINEN

K I T J M B W T X U K G J H B  
A K I Y V E H D K S K I N J U  
A F A A K G A D F K R W U Q Q  
W S R Y I Y B G H C P N Y M N  
K W T L R D A L H U N L I T R  
H C R H L A I R L E B I E Q H  
S W O M U N R A F G R I Q U Z  
O P P U E O N O B A O E T E E  
T O L N B D D Y P O I T A C U  
W Y W M S Y W O F M L I W Z Q  
X W K C H U A V C N E R D U M  
U Z A G N I T N I A P T A H I  
R P P O Z L W Q D H Z P N H L  
E J X X J S V B N E E R G O W  
I N S T A L L A T I O N Z G C

## About the artist

Born in 1978 on Gadigal land /Sydney, Julian Meagher grew up in a family that encouraged the arts. With his mother a designer and painter, the children were often taken to galleries and encouraged to paint. As a teenager Meagher attended classes at the renowned Julian Ashton School in Sydney.

The high school Meagher attended had an artist-in-residence program where he was taught by artists like Philip Wolfhagen and Robert Hannaford. Through this experience Meagher learnt that it was possible to “eek out an existence as an artist ...if you work hard enough and are incredibly lucky”. (Julian Meagher interview with Maria Stoljar. <https://talkingwithpainters.com/2021/11/15/ep-117-julian-meagher/>)

Julian Meagher studied at university, enrolling in Medicine to become a doctor. Midway through his medical studies, his ongoing interest in art led him to undertake a classical education in portrait painting at Charles H Cecil Studios in Florence. Here he studied traditional methods including intensive life drawing for one month. The discipline he gained here was about “training the eye”. (Julian Meagher interview with Maria Stoljar. <https://talkingwithpainters.com/2021/11/15/ep-117-julian-meagher/>)

Julian Meagher completed his medical studies and practiced in the profession before pursuing his painting career. He is a celebrated contemporary artist who has exhibited widely. His work has been shown extensively across Australia, Asia and America. Meagher has been a finalist in the Archibald Portrait Prize 2014, 2015, 2018, and 2021, the Wynne Prize 2015 and the Gold Award at Rockhampton Regional Gallery 2016. Meagher has also been a finalist multiple times in the Doug Moran Portrait prize, Salon Des Refuses, Metro Art prize, Blake Prize for Religious Art and the RBS Emerging Artist Prize. He was a co-director of Chalk Horse Gallery from 2009-2016.

## What is ‘the green ray’?

This exhibition continues Meagher’s interest in atmospheric optical phenomena. The ‘green ray’ is a light effect sometimes visible on an unobstructed distant horizon at sunset and sunrise. It appears in tandem with a mirage, and though it exists, is so uncommon it has been described as mythical.

Its rarity and beauty have attracted a variety of legends and fables. One such superstition, relayed by Jules Verne in his 1882 novel *Le Rayon Vert* (*The Green Ray*), claims that anyone who sees the ray cannot go wrong in matters of the heart. For moments in time, natural light illuminates different aspects of nature including coloured light from the sun and moon and particles in the air.

The exhibition *The Green Ray* plays with hyper-romantic links between nature and feeling, real and unreal. Nostalgia, family holidays, falling in love and life passing: what seems fleeting can instead be something enduring, revealed to us only in glimpses. The phenomena of ‘the green ray’ is explored in both the paintings and light installations in the exhibition.

**Activity:** Look at Meagher’s paintings *The Green Ray 1*, (2022) and *The Green Ray 6*, (2022) in this exhibition. Notice the parallel vertical lines shooting up into the sky. Julian Meagher explains that rays of light are actually parallel even though our eyes perceive them as radiating out from the centre of our viewpoint.

**Further:** Observe sunsets and moments when the sun is low in the sky to see how the rays of light perform. Take a picture and try to draw the direction of the light.



Julian Meagher, *The Green Ray -6*, 2022, oil on linen, 214 x 198cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Yuvuz Gallery.

## Landscape Painting

While Julian Meagher's practice includes the genres of still life and portraiture, the works in this exhibition show a return to some of the artist's earliest subject matter: the land and sky.

Many of Meagher's most treasured childhood memories come from family holidays in Kialla, NSW and it was there that he painted some of his first landscapes as a teenager. *The Green Ray* draws from this personal history to explore relationships between nostalgia, time, family, and the natural environment, through a series of paintings and light installations.

In the landscape of Kialla, NSW, rising to an altitude of over 900 metres above sea level, the sky dominates the scenery. Warm in summer and freezing cold and gusty in winter, the skies reflect this changeable weather. The sense of refracted light in his paintings convey this environment.

For his particular painting technique, Meagher uses oil primed Belgian linen (not acrylic primed) which makes a difference when scraping back the paint. After using watercolours to paint outdoors '*en plein air*' during a residency, Meagher returned to his studio and thinned down oil paints to create similar immediate wash effects.

Look at *The Green Ray -4* (2022) (opposite) and see if you can identify where Meagher has used the following gestures and effects: smearing, blending, dragging, scrubbing and dripping.

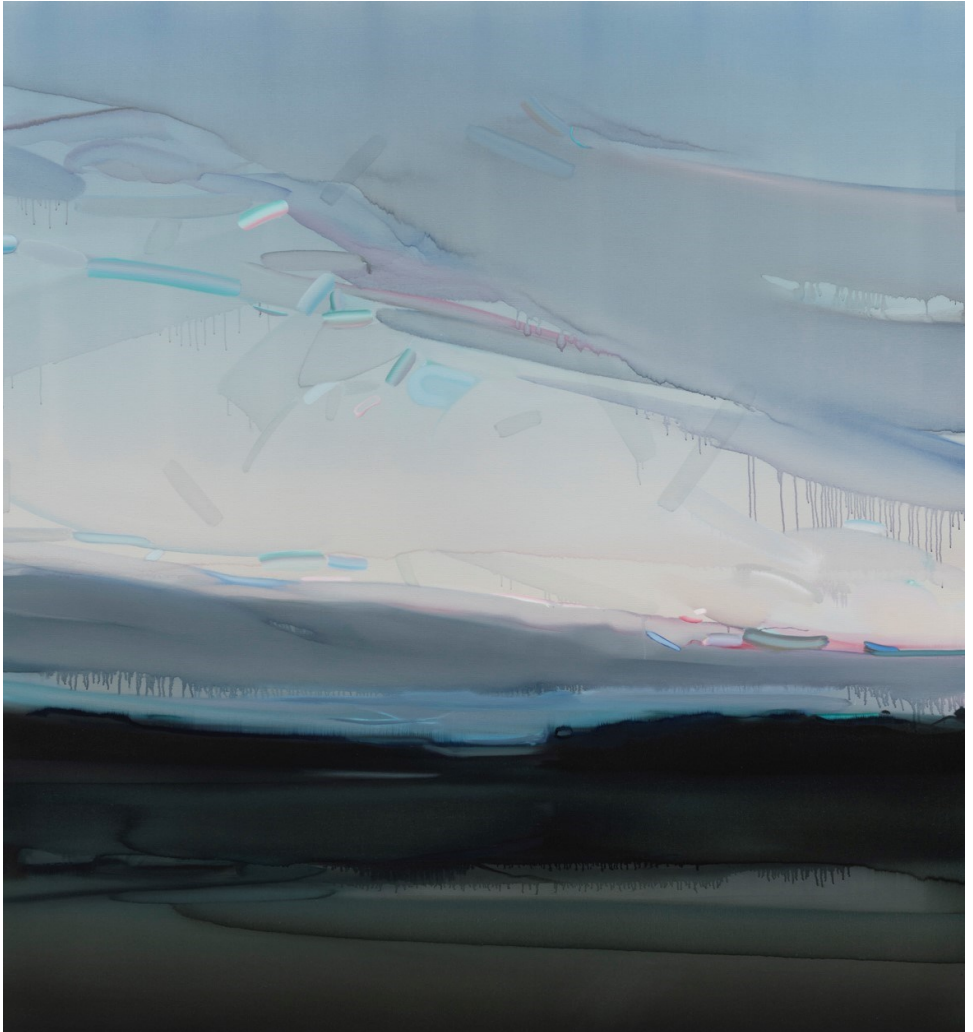
These physical gestures, using large brushes and lots of rags, result in works that are often still and meditative.

Meagher's paintings are "not very noisy" allowing "so much more space for an emotional narrative... more to do with feeling and memory and mystery and dreams and beautiful stuff because you are not looking at anything—nothing to see but something to feel....I think that's why they are powerful".

Julian Meagher interview with Maria Stoljar. <https://talkingwithpainters.com/2021/11/15/ep-117-julian-meagher/>



**Activity:** Paint layers of thick paint over a canvas or board and, before the paint dries, scrape the paint off using various tools and materials such as pieces of cardboard, a fork or palette knife or rags. Do it quickly and spontaneously without thinking too much about the composition. Play music and respond to the tempo and beat.



Julian Meagher, *The Green Ray -6*, 2022, oil on linen, 214 x 198cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Yuvuz Gallery.

## Nature

Julian Meagher has presented three paintings of the *Carpobrotus* or native Pig Face flower, in close-up detail to create almost abstract compositions.

How does the light installation change these paintings over time?

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Describe how the colours react to the different lights.

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This work is considered 4D as it incorporates the element of time.

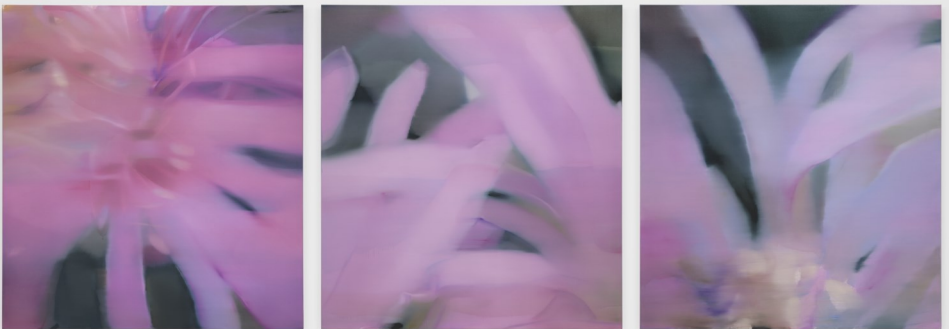
What other types of artworks are 4D?

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Research them and list some here:

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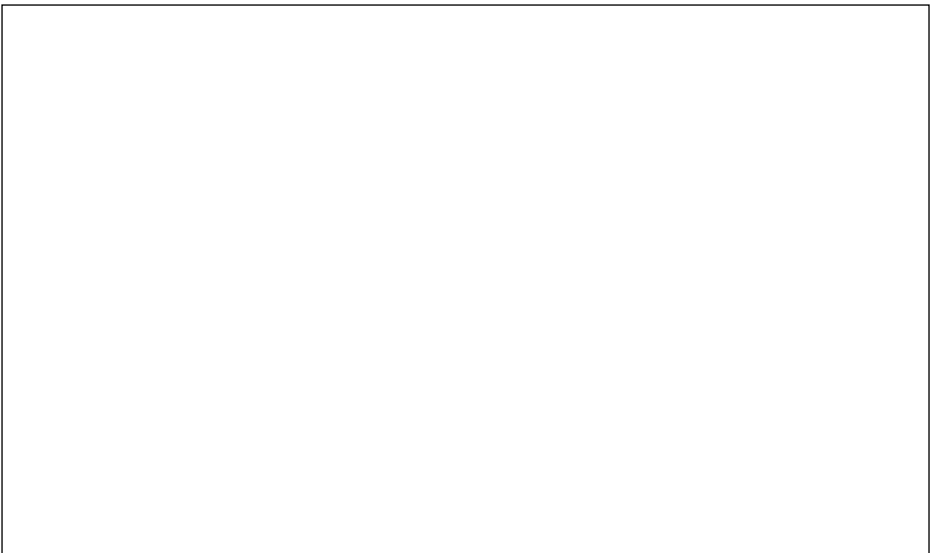


Julian Meagher, *The Green Ray—8, 9, 10* (triptych), 2022, oil on linen, 214 x 198cm (each).  
Image courtesy of the artist and Yuvuz Gallery.

**Activity:** Photograph or draw native Australian flowering plants you see in the garden or in bushland near you. Look carefully at how they are formed and include details of the leaves and flowers. Notice how the colour changes at different times of the day depending upon the light.



**Extension activity:** Create a second close up drawing of the flower and transform it into a semi-abstract composition. Turn it into a painting.



**The Frames** refer to the four lenses we use to look at art, in order to find meaning in an artwork.

In the NSW Visual Arts Syllabus, the Frames are tools used to provide different perspectives or viewpoints for understanding the relationships between the 'agencies of the artworld': artist, artwork, world, and audience.

**Structural Frame:** Communication—signs and symbols—materials, techniques, visual language (composition, line shape, tone, colour..).

**Subjective Frame:** Personal and psychological meaning; memories, imagination, experiences, intuition, sub-conscious; response based on all the senses.

**Cultural Frame:** Social and cultural meaning, art movement and style, influences, cultural affiliations.

**Postmodern Frame:** Challenges mainstream ideas; use of non-traditional media or methods, irony, parody, pastiche, satire.

1) Choose one painting from The *Green Ray* exhibition, give the title and describe it in the Structural Frame. Describe also how the paint has been applied.

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2) Find one painting from The *Green Ray* exhibition, give the title and describe how you think it fits into the Subjective Frame.

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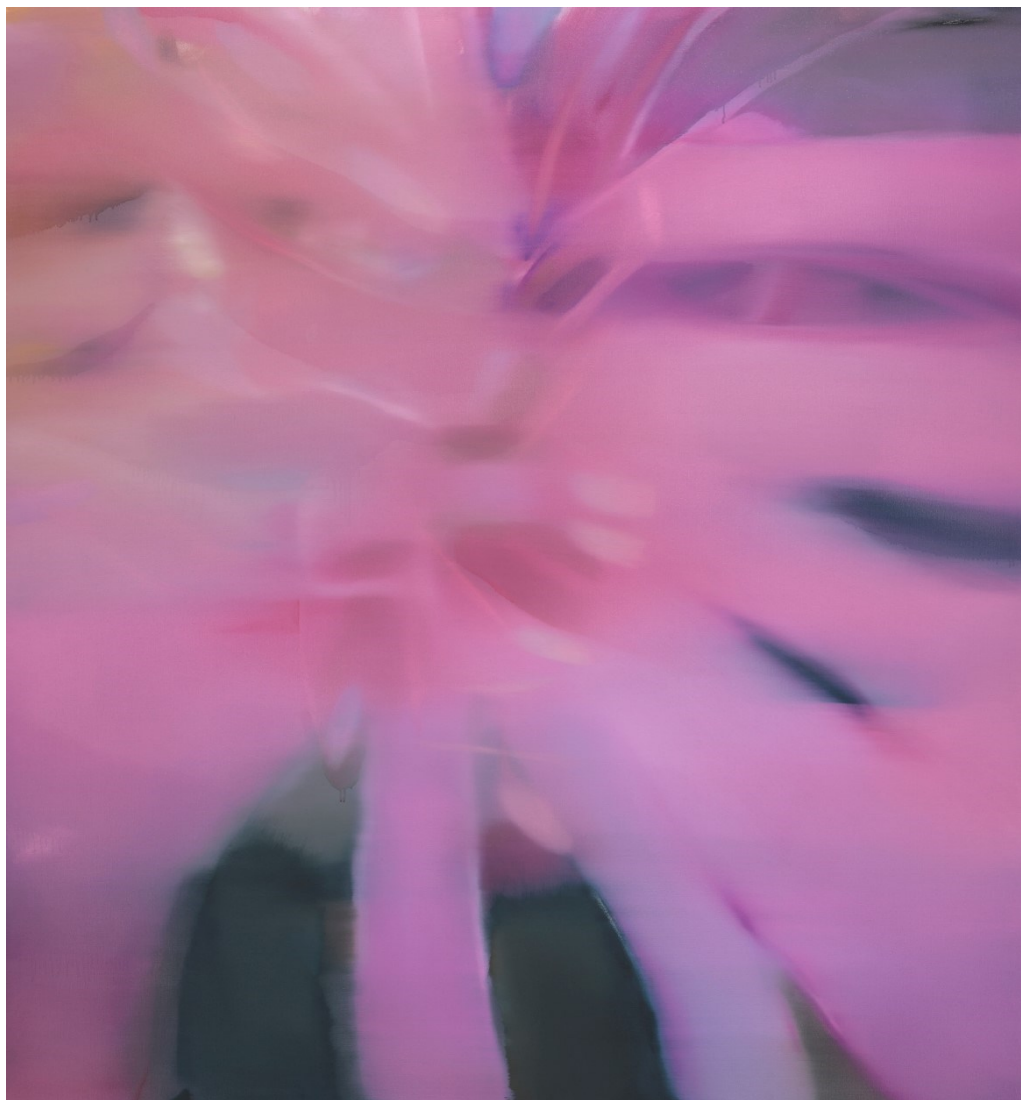
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3) How do you feel about this artwork? What is your emotive response?

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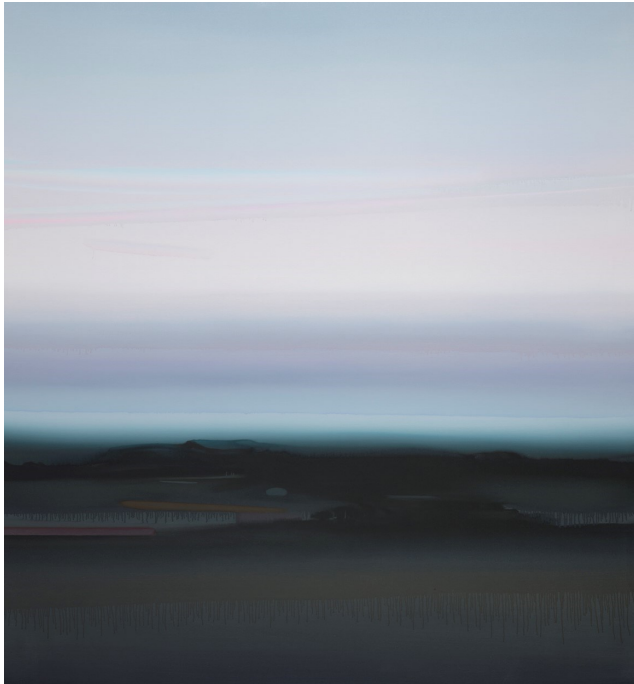
Julian Meagher, *The Green Ray—8*, 2022, oil on linen, 214 x 198cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Yuvuz Gallery.

## Fill in the blanks

Using the following words, fill in the gaps in these sentences about Julian Meagher's *The Green Ray* exhibition.

COLOUR            KIALLA            JULIAN            LINEN  
INSTALLED        TRIPTYCH        LANDSCAPES    OIL  
PORTRAIT        LIGHTS

- 1) The artist of *The Green Ray* Meagher's first name is \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2) In this exhibition Julian Meagher has painted \_\_\_\_\_ inspired by his childhood memories of \_\_\_\_\_ near Goulburn.
- 3) All of the paintings in this exhibition are \_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_.
- 4) When you paint a picture of a person it is called a \_\_\_\_\_.
- 5) \_\_\_\_\_ changing \_\_\_\_\_ are on the floor in front of three paintings.



Julian Meagher, *The Green Ray -7*, 2022., oil on linen, 214 x 198cm. Courtesy of the artist and Yuvuz Gallery.

## Memory and family

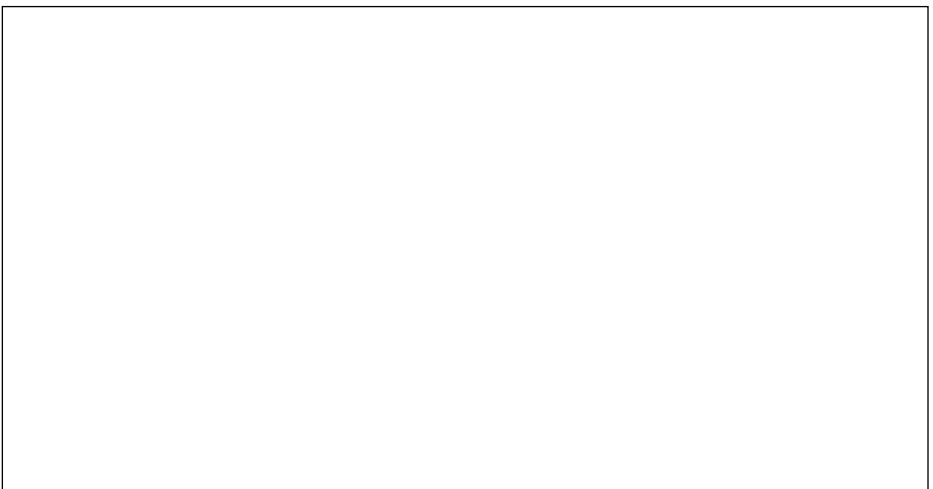


This is a portrait of the artist's daughter. The title refers to 'rapid eye movement' which describes a period of sleep in which most dreams occur and the eyes make many small movements.

Meagher describes these portraits as 'dreamscapes'.

Julian Meagher, *Rapid Eye Movement—5*, 2023 , oil on linen, 157 x 46cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Yuvuz Gallery.

**Activity:** Draw a portrait of a member of your family or a friend.



*We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land where the Goulburn Regional Art Gallery operates today and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.*

Image front: *'The Green Ray -1'* 2022. Oil on linen. 245 x 198cm.  
Image courtesy of the artist and Yuvuz Gallery



Goulburn Regional Art Gallery is supported by the NSW government through Create NSW