

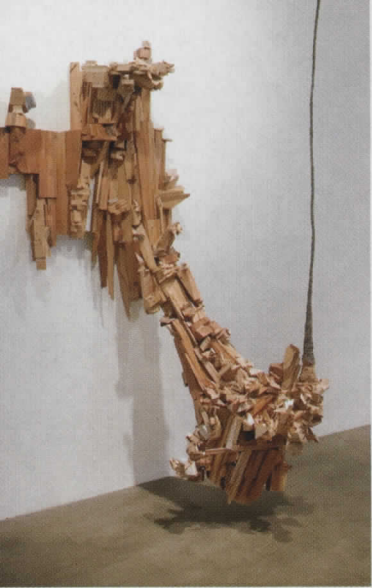
Fred Williams: *Lal Lal Falls III*, 1981, oil on canvas, 71 7/8 by 60 inches; at LA Louver.

LOS ANGELES

Fred Williams at LA Louver

Highly esteemed in his native Australia but little-known in the U.S.—a 1977 solo exhibition at MOMA notwithstanding—Fred Williams (1927-1982) took the dramatic landforms of the Outback as the subject of his most interesting paintings. "Fred Williams: The Later Landscapes, 1975-1981" made the case that the artist grew into ever closer emotional contact with his motifs, embracing a plein-air method, a cautiously playful touch, and a lively palette that grounds flourishes of keyed-up primary and secondary hues with rich expanses of thinned earth tones and inflected grays.

Meant to be portable, many canvases are not more than 4 feet high or wide. Bits of dark, hot blues and emerald greens, rubbed-over brick reds and glossy patches of umber-black stud the surface of *Strath Creek Falls III* (1979), a rugged spot viewed from an elevated vantage point. The picture might tumble into abstraction, its crabbed calligraphy of flecks, daubs and scraggly smears freed of descriptive function, if not for the central, anchoring geological feature: a forked, lightning-crisp rivulet of white water framed by black rock shooting through the center. As in Cézanne, color indicates relative position in space, recording a perceptual response to the expe-



Jared Pankin: *Natural, Natural History (Lucifer's Left Nut)*, 2005, mixed mediums, 76 by 49 by 39 inches; at Carl Berg.

rience of landscape. But the level of connection is closer to the gut. The raspy, dissolving topography of *Dry Creek Bed* (1976), schematic yet vertiginous on a hotly glowing pale ocher ground, might have been rendered with sandpaper and sticks.

A few paintings are structured around a thudding horizon line somewhere above center, its severity tempered by skittering brushwork indicating scrawny gum trees and undergrowth. In the restless, rubiginous *Lysterfield Paddock, Woodstacks* (1977),

the very earth is alive with suggestive, writhing forms. A couple of unsteady piles of logs betoken the comically insignificant imprint of humanity upon this forbidding land, under a yawning, steely sky.

The 17 works span a curious range of styles, from the Impressionism-derived *Kew Billabong, Old Tyre II* (1975), depicting a shimmering swamp beyond a ruddy, sliding foreground, to late, somewhat larger, reductivist aerial views of landscape formations like *Coastline (A)* and *Riverbed (C)*. The most personal works are somewhere in between. In the riveting, 6-foot-tall *Lal Lal Falls III* (1981), muscular, parallel bars dominated by black, white and ocher are surrounded by brushy, dirty violet-gray flecked with green. In the foreground—at our feet—a whisklike fringe of rough grass provides just enough naturalistic detail to advise us that the central, emerald pool is far below, and we are peering over the edge of a precipice.

—Stephen Maine

Jared Pankin at Carl Berg

Jared Pankin's inventive new sculptures probe the increasingly murky distinction in our culture between the natural and the artificial, the raw and the cooked. In his works, finely detailed models of palm and fir trees are installed on sprawling, angular conglomerations of axed plywood, found pressboard fragments and two-by-fours. The rough