

# GILDED HISTORY

Australian artist Paul Davies reveals the genesis of his series of artworks

Linking 19th-century gold rushes in California and Australia with modern-day Los Angeles.



EVERYTHING LOOSE WILL LAND IN LA ©2011 BY PAUL DAVIES

In a moment of realisation it was the eucalyptus trees strangely dotted throughout Los Angeles that revealed a connection between my adopted home in California and my native home in Sydney.

This unexpected link sparked a series of paintings. I've been working on for over three years, titled *Everything Loose Will Land in LA/Double Golden Gully*. The paintings formed part of a site-specific installation that I was invited to present at the MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles earlier this year; they were later exhibited in Sydney at the Olsen gallery.

"Everything loose will land in Los Angeles" is a quote from Frank Lloyd Wright, who described the city as a centre-less sprawl of buildings and billboards. To me, this description can be further extended to the multitude of searching souls who land in LA from all over the globe.

The second part of the title, *Double Golden Gully*, refers to a disused gold mining location in New South Wales, Golden Gully. The word 'double' is added to suggest a gambling term, rather than a place, infused with the notion of instant luck and risk.

Australia's gold rush began after prospector Edward Hargraves noticed that the landscapes producing gold in California were also present in Australia. Coincidentally, during this time Australia began exporting gum trees to California to support its growing population. I liked this idea of a shared experience between two places on opposite sides of the Pacific Rim. The duality of commercial exports linking the two places, as well as the emerging cultural presence in each landscape, was an interesting juxtaposition.

In addition, Golden Gully is a place of significance to Australian artists and poets, who documented the nearby town, Hill End, in its transformation from a booming metropolis during the gold rush to an abandoned outpost once the gold was gone. An excerpt from the poem *The Roaring Days* by Henry Lawson, written in 1889, exemplifies this and was significant to the development of the paintings:

*The night too quickly passes*

*And we are growing old,*

*So let us fill our glasses*

*When finds of wondrous treasure*

*Set all the South ablaze,*

*And you and I were faithful mates*

*All through the roaring days!*

The native Australian gum trees scattered throughout Los Angeles remind me of the gold rush link between both places. Furthermore, Frank Lloyd Wright's quote is just as relevant today, as many Australians are drawn to Hollywood to try their luck.

Los Angeles is something of an El Dorado for actors, filmmakers and artists. Like the gold prospectors of the 19th century, these are people who come to the city seeking success in a difficult industry.

The series *Everything Loose Will Land in LA* ... looks at this idea of history repeating through a lens of photography and painting. Reflecting on the notion of Hollywood and the silver screen, the scenes are painted with silver pigment. Like the hopeful actor, artist or director, the paint shines more intensely depending on the angle at which the picture is viewed.

Here, photographs taken of these locations in Australia and California are layered to create imaginary painted scenes in shimmering tones that hover between fact and fiction, rationality and emotion and, perhaps most pertinently, reality and dreams. ■