

Exhibition Title: **RESILIENCE**  
Artist: **Jo Reitze**  
Dates: **4 September - 6 October 2024**

Venue: **HATROCK CONTEMPORARY, 2330 Portarlington Road, Bellarine 3223**

**The gnarled, windswept trees at Ocean Grove beach epitomize RESILIENCE.**

We can learn much from these *Macrocarpa* Cypresses that bent to survive gales and harsh conditions. Their pertinence, during prolonged COVID Lockdowns in Melbourne, was acute. Their resilience would inspire my resilience. After the initial shock of our world changing, I soon resolved that this would be my time to paint. Far from the sea, I had found the ISO project that would obsess and entertain me, for two years, generating a series of far too many works, large and small in oils, gouache and pen.

I have been searching for a space to show this body of work and was delighted to discover Hat Rock Contemporary with its bright, uncluttered space, not too far from Ocean Grove. Thanks to Pete Logan, Curator, Hat Rock Contemporary for presenting RESILIENCE.

Prior to COVID, I had almost exclusively painted 'en plein air.' In 2020 and 2021, I too had to bend like these trees and find new ways of working. Previously I had dismissed artists who copied photographs. Locked down in Surrey Hills, I required secondary sources. I found the back lighting of my iPad and the ability to zoom and crop my photographs to create new compositions, made this project possible. I did not grid so had to learn to work small to big rather than condensing what I saw. All but some of the oils on linen, filled frames that I had collected over the years or had been kindly given. This was another motivation, as I resolved not to die with a bungalow full of empty frames. I upcycled them with blackboard paint and was pleased with the sustainability of this process. In the interludes between lockdowns I purchased new mounts, in black, white or grey for several frames. I also painted my garden and flower studies, but it was mostly these gnarled, windswept trees that sustained me through the extended lockdowns.

Working from photographs also enabled me to have new viewpoints as many of these spots were too exposed to paint on location. The tousled, long grasses, not seen from my culvert 'studio,' are featured in many works. I enjoyed capturing their movement and dynamism, evoking the rejuvenating sea air that I was greatly missing. In all mediums, I have worked freely with lyrical, expressive mark-making, mostly using small taklon brushes or fine liners. Works often show the surrounding stunted coastal trees with occasional glimpses of the sea beyond which locates the trees. In many, the vibrant blue skies of sunny days, evoke positivity as we witness strength during challenging times. Even when there are ominous, dark clouds of approaching storms, we still see hope. In my scribbly, asymmetrical black and white pen drawings, the strong tonal contrasts of the dark trees against white or cloudy skies also emphasize their fortitude.

These tough trees are environmentally significant too as they shade the picnic area, prevent the erosion of sandy soils, reduce air pollution, provide habitat and create a beautiful scene.

Lockdown has been the only period in my life that I have had uninterrupted time to paint. While others struggled, I felt blessed to be an artist with much to motivate and nourish me.

I hope RESILIENCE inspires.

Jo