

Stormie Mills: All the secrets are buried between the oceans and the mountains

Artwork Labels

Introduction

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Wall text:

Stormie Mills: All the secrets are buried between the oceans and the mountains

Born in Colwyn Bay, Wales, in 1969, Stormie Mills moved to Perth, Western Australia, with his family at the age of three. Throughout his childhood, the family lived between Perth and Wales, spending extended periods in both places. In Perth, he began painting in public spaces in 1984, initiating a practice that emerged not through formal training but through experimentation, observation and persistence. The street functioned simultaneously as studio and teacher, where limitations opened new possibilities and missteps formed part of the work, shaping a practice in which uncertainty became a productive condition of making. As Mills observed in 2008, graffiti is “a movement of artwork created in adverse conditions.”

As a teenager, Mills returned to Wales for a period, living with his grandmother before travelling independently to London and New York. Encounters with graffiti writers and the energy of the city streets reinforced a commitment to making art that would shape the direction of his life and career. Returning to Perth in the 1990s did not mark an end to Mills’ pattern of travel and relocation. His practice continued to expand beyond Western Australia as he lived and worked across Australia and internationally, producing public artworks and

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exhibitions throughout the United Kingdom, Europe, the United States and Asia. His projects have taken him to abandoned villages in Scotland, mural commissions in Greece, and exhibitions in London, Los Angeles, Miami, Tokyo and Berlin.

Despite this international reach, Mills remains committed to the quieter exchanges that occur through creativity. Through workshops, collaborations and community-based projects, he shares aspects of his practice with people from diverse backgrounds, creating spaces where making becomes a way of connecting with others. These movements between places and the relationships formed along the way sit at the heart of Mills' creative life.

Across public and private worlds, Mills' work is encountered in streets, buildings and gallery spaces, where his monochromatic figures appear, often unexpectedly, in the course of daily life.

Working between painting, sculpture and site-specific work, Mills' practice is grounded in a material language drawn directly from its surroundings. His first solo gallery exhibition in 1999 marked a shift from street to canvas, prompting a rethinking of surface itself, where painted fields were disrupted and reworked to carry the immediacy of street-based practice into studio conditions. Since that time, remnants of the street – dust and dirt swept from the studio floor – have at times been incorporated into the paint medium, binding the act of making to the environments it responds to. In this

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way, image and surface remain inseparable from the conditions of their production.

Throughout his practice, Mills has challenged the distinction between the spaces in which art is encountered. Materials associated with the overlooked and everyday are transformed through the act of making, carrying traces of their origins into the gallery. What has been lived with, walked over, weathered and marked by the world beyond the gallery is held within objects that invite attention and care.

Within this exhibition, the relationship between artwork, environment and audience continues to shift. Works embedded within the floor extend Mills' interest in surface as something active and contingent. Their reflective ground responds to movement, as do the paintings upon it, both gathering traces of encounter and becoming records of those who pass through this space. In contrast, Mills' paintings, works on found objects and sculptural forms remain situated within the conventions of the gallery, where touch is withheld, and the surface holds a different kind of distance.

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Stormie Mills

born 1969 Colwyn Bay, Wales, Great Britain

arrived Western Australia 1972

works between Australia and Italy

Memento mori skull

2025

acrylic on linen

Collection of the artist

2026/E063

What we see in others we recognise in ourselves

2025

acrylic on canvas

Collection of the artist

2025/E110

This painting depicts a close friend of Mills who works as a house painter in nursing homes, repainting after a resident's death to prepare spaces for the next person to live there. Attentive to the quiet acts of care that accompany such transitions, the work gestures towards the processes surrounding final farewells. It acknowledges the everyday labour of those who move gently through these environments, where last days, weeks, or even years are lived out, and are no less significant than the many moments that precede them.

Reimagining this role through a reaper-like figure suggests that repainting, buffing out, or clearing space are equally relevant acts in making way for what comes next.

Left to right, top to bottom

Portrait of Mode 2

2025–26

acrylic on linen and oilbar

Collection of the artist

2026/E057

Portrait of John Fekner

2025–26

acrylic on linen and oilbar

Collection of the artist

2026/E060

Portrait of Risky

2025–26

acrylic on linen and oilbar

Collection of the artist

2026/E062

Portrait of Borondo

2025–26

acrylic on linen and oilbar

Collection of the artist

2026/E059

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Portrait of Kid Acne

2025–26

acrylic on linen and oilbar

Collection of the artist

2026/E058

Portrait of Futura

2025–26

acrylic on linen and oilbar

Collection of the artist

2026/E055

Portrait of Juice 126

2025–26

acrylic on linen and oilbar

Collection of the artist

2026/E061

Portrait of Haas

2025–26

acrylic on linen and oilbar

Collection of the artist

2026/E056

Mills' longstanding connections throughout international street art communities underpin this body of work centred on portraiture, friendship and artistic influence. The artists represented here work under pseudonyms,

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maintaining carefully guarded identities as part of ongoing practices of making art in public space. The portraits bring into focus Mills' peers – fellow street artists and friends – encountered here through a direct exchange. Mills' recurring pink skull appears in each image as a shared condition rather than a marker of difference, holding presence and concealment together, without resolving the distance between them. These portraits point to a paradox familiar beyond the world of street art: that we are always, to some extent, both known and unknowable.

Revisiting secrets

2025

acrylic on canvas

Collection of the artist

2025/E116

Filtered lives

2025

acrylic on canvas

Collection of the artist

2025/E111

In this series of paintings, Mills brings together depictions of friends and imagined selves that speak to the stories we carry and the versions of ourselves we construct through return and recollection. The series considers the relationship between inner and external states – how we look to people, places and experiences in an effort to understand what exists within. In contemplating the thoughts we return to, the possibilities we leave behind, and the gradual process of letting go of what was and what might have been, these works explore how we make meaning from the lives we have lived and the realities we inhabit.

Our secrets are the lies we tell ourselves

2025

acrylic on canvas

Collection of the artist

2025/E113

The mysteries I've left behind

2025

acrylic on canvas

Collection of the artist

2025/E112

Memento mori skull sculpture

2025–26

polystyrene and Jesmonite

Collection of the artist

2025/E118

There was no one

2025

acrylic on board

Collection of the artist

2025/E114.a-j

Throughout Mills' practice, his figures painted in public spaces exist within the streets and buildings they inhabit. Within galleries, however, they often appear against sparse fields of paint, their surroundings left unresolved. Rather than placing them in a fixed location, these open spaces invite viewers to imagine where Mills' figures might be.

Mills' landscape paintings engage with these possibilities while relating to sites of meaning for the artist. In *There was no one*, the vastness and potential for isolation echo the emotional terrain his figures often occupy. For Mills, the physicality of oceans and mountains represents people who changed how he sees the world, offering a hopeful perspective and the understanding that, as Mills states, "in knowing that I understand less I can feel more."

We all have secrets

2007

mixed media on canvas

Collection of Caroline Johnston and Paul Anderson

2026/E109

The endless dusk

2025

acrylic on board

Collection of the artist

2025/E115.a-j

The endless dusk sits in dialogue with its counterpart, *There was no one*, signalling Mills' sense of place and belonging. Of Colwyn Bay, Wales, his place of birth, he recalls "the constantly changing tide that brings the sea to your feet and sandwiches you between itself and the mountains." Arriving in Perth as a young child in the early 1970s presented a different landscape, where the horizon felt endless and distance from his former home was intensified by the slower modes of communication of the time. The coastline depicted here, off the island of Sardinia in the Mediterranean Sea, reminded Mills of Western Australia. Across these geographies, the painting suggests that home is not fixed to a single place but can emerge as experiences overlap and settle.

Stormie Mills

born 1969 Colwyn Bay, Wales, Great Britain

arrived Western Australia 1972

works between Australia and Italy

There is unbroken continuity

2011

acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of W.K and H.L - Private Collection

2026/E123.a-b

There is unbroken continuity was made following Mills' return to Perth after his grandfather's funeral in Wales. The title is drawn from a poem read at the service, framing death not as an endpoint but as a continuation through what remains – in what is remembered, the environment and the lives of others. Reflecting on life after the death of a loved one, where grief is carried through generations and within a newly experienced emptiness, the work considers loss not as a single moment. Instead, it extends through shared histories and the everyday rhythms that outlast individual life.

Within this, emptiness is understood not as absence alone, but as a space that allows for new ways of being and the ongoing presence of the world.



1 **We are all dust**

2015

acrylic, dirt, spray paint, graffiti remover and oil on canvas

Collection of Harry and Lucy Karelis

2026/E114

2 **Sometimes life betrays you**

2015

acrylic, dirt, spray paint, graffiti remover and oil on canvas

Collection of Linda McCormack

2026/E107

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3 **Such is an artistic life**

2019

oilbar and acrylic on board

Collection of Melissa Lekias

2026/E106

4 **I miss my friend,
I want him back**

2008

acrylic and spray paint on canvas

Collection of Lorena and Chantel

2026/E116

5 **When I left for the last time
I referred to you as blood**

2011

acrylic, dirt, spray paint, graffiti remover and oil on
canvas

Collection of Jessica Jura

2026/E115

6 **The pain is gone
but the memory remains**

2011

spray paint, acrylic, dirt and graffiti remover on canvas

The Ivanki Collection

2026/E119

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7 **What is left behind**

2012

acrylic, dirt, spray paint, graffiti remover and oil on
found object

Private Collection

2026/E112

8 **Mictlantecuhtli**

2013

acrylic, dirt, spray paint, graffiti remover and oil on
found object

Collection of Lorena and Chantel

2026/E117

9 **Take this from me I never wanted it to begin with**

2010

paint on found object

Collection of Melissa Lekias

2026/E104

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10 **When vampires love
they love forever**

2015

paint on canvas

Collection of Melissa Lekias

2026/E103

11 **Love is my religion**

2020

oilbar and acrylic on found object

Collection of the artist

2026/E105

12 **First punch**

2009

acrylic, spray paint and dirt on canvas

Collection of Stefan and Peggy Gosatti

2026/E120

13 **Proximamente**

2007

mixed media on canvas

Collection of Shane Hogan

2026/E124

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14 **Within this web lies a truth**

2015

acrylic, dirt, spray paint, graffiti remover and oil on canvas

Private Collection

2026/E110

15 **The application of dirt-black**

2009

acrylic and spray paint on found object

Collection of Marco D'Orsogna

2026/E122

16 **Lack of focus**

2019

paint and oilbar on board

Collection of the Stingemore family

2026/E121

17 **Darkness visible**

2012

acrylic, dirt, spray paint, graffiti remover and oil on found objects

Collection of the Sullivan family

2026/E113

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18 **To be judged for your actions and not your words**

2011

acrylic on found object

Collection of Craig Surtees

2026/E111

19 **Grounded**

2010

acrylic and dirt on found object

Collection of Sean and Katie Edwards

2026/E108

Bringing together earlier works that reveal Mills' artistic development, this selection offers a focused view of his practice. Across canvas, board and found objects, ideas of love and loss sit alongside an awareness of the impermanence that shapes lived experience, embedded within both the subjects depicted and the materials from which the works are made. Figures appear in these works as part of an evolving visual language, emerging in states of pause, as if held momentarily in the act of becoming. They present as companions, witnesses and stand-ins, carrying traces of vulnerability, resilience, longing and hope. At once playful and contemplative, they dance, linger and battle their way through uncertain moments, poised between gesture and stillness.

Wall text:

All the secrets are buried between the oceans and the mountains sets out a space for shifting states and blurred horizons, where meaning is formed in the intervals between memory and place, presence and absence, beginning and continuation. The mirrored threshold at its centre destabilises certainty and returns the act of looking back to the viewer, creating an echo of the present. In this moment, what is sought is inseparable from the process of seeking itself; it becomes a point of suspension where past and present intersect and are briefly held in balance.

Within this zone of reflection and unfixed perspectives, Stormie Mills considers what can be known about another person and what remains concealed. Secrets are not presented here as revelations waiting to be uncovered, but as part of the fabric of being human. Some are spoken; others are left unspoken, carried quietly within us and etched into our bones.

As Mills' skeleton paintings float through this space, existing between worlds, they give form to these ideas. Part self-portrait, part universal symbol, they speak to mortality while reminding us of what lies beneath the identities we construct and the stories we tell. The skull, in turn, shifts attention inward. It is where thought is held in motion, where recollection does not sit still but accumulates, fragments and reorders itself over time. It becomes a site of interior life rather than conclusion

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– a space where emotion and perception are revisited or reassembled. Here, where separation from the world gives way to belonging, relationships between people and place remain open, shaped by what is shared and what is withheld.

My shadow says I'm one thing, the light says I'm another

2010

acrylic, dirt, spray paint and graffiti remover on canvas

Private Collection

2026/E118

Autos (self portrait)

2026

oil pastel and acrylic on canvas

Collection of the artist

2025/E117