

SIMPSON DESERT 1991

Artist's Comment on 'Simpson Desert' (also known as 'The Edge of the Simpson Desert'. Oil on Linen. 1010 x 1520 mm. 1991. Private Collection. Extract from International Art Centre Auction Catalogue 2025.



In 1990 I was invited to join the Headmaster and a party of senior teachers from Melbourne Grammar School on their annual four-wheel drive escape into the Australian Outback.

This time they were venturing through Adelaide, up to Coober Pedy and then branching north-eastward through Oodnadatta, across the Simpson Desert to Birdsville, down the Birdsville Track on the western flank of the Flinders Ranges and home. It was a memorable few weeks, day after day crawling slowly through the endlessly repetitive, low-dune flatness of the desert, camping each night. But the monotony was relieved by two things. First, the entertaining company inside the vehicle: to pass the time of day as we trundled along each one of us, trusting the privacy of our big white Toyota, told their life stories - very much a modern Canterbury Tales confessional (The Headmaster's Story, The Headmaster's Wife's Story) - and secondly, the extraordinary intensity of the sunsets in that dry, pristine atmosphere. I felt I was on another planet, and, easily ignoring the small caravan of vehicles, that I was witnessing exactly what human eyes would have seen 100,000 years ago.

I did four or five paintings from that experience. I loved the naturally heightened colour and the surreal, other-worldliness of that ageless landscape, and it stays with me still.

Sir Grahame Sydney