



DANIEL O'TOOLE

This multi-media artist uses everyday miracles of nature to mesmerise gallery-goers.

If Daniel O'Toole had been better at maths, he might have become a pilot like his father, grandfathers and uncles but "I was too much of a daydreamer to be trusted at the helm of a 747," jokes the 38-year-old. Instead, his love of flying and wonder at the world above the clouds have fuelled a lifelong fascination with light and inspired his art. A recent video work, for example, grew out of a daily ritual at his local café – filming the sunlight refracted through a glass of water onto his sketchbook. "I'd like people to feel connected to nature, even though they're in a gallery," he says. "It's my goal to create the same magic you feel when you happen across a rainbow or notice some small, beautiful miracle in nature."

Starting out 15 years ago as a busker known as "Ears", O'Toole pumped out up to 100 Picasso-esque portraits a day on King Street in Sydney's Newtown, painting on cardboard for a donation, before venturing into abstract public murals and more experimental territory. Influenced by the 1960s Light and Space movement, he now creates paintings, photography, videos and installations, selling half his work overseas.

In 2019, O'Toole moved to Melbourne just before the pandemic lockdowns but his career has since taken flight: he made a video that formed the 20-metre-wide backdrop of the Ginger & Smart Australian Fashion Week runway show in 2021 and had three solo exhibitions in 2022, as well as works commissioned for the Louis Vuitton store at Sydney Airport.

A musician, O'Toole often incorporates sound into his work, making use of his synaesthesia – what he calls a "miscommunication in the brain", which means he sees colours with sounds. As a five-year-old learning violin, he'd call the G string "the red string" and he still experiences music as flashes of colour. His current focus is minimal colour field paintings, each of them framed behind a frosted acrylic screen with mirrors on the inside edges of the frame to subtly animate the image and create a play of light that seems kinetic. He likens the hypnotic viewing experience to that of staring at rain or fire. With light, nature and natural phenomena as his core themes, "I don't feel I'll run out of rope. Light's kind of everything. We don't exist without it." ●

Studied at:

Diploma of Audio Engineering, SAE, Sydney; National Art School, Sydney

Exhibited at:

The National Gallery of Victoria; Lyon Biennale of Contemporary Art; Affordable Art Fair Brussels; A.M. Bjere gallery, New York; Benalla Art Gallery, Victoria

Breakthrough moments:

Last year, O'Toole was named as a finalist in the Dobell Drawing Prize and his first institutional solo show – sound installation *Voices from the Void* – is at Victoria's Benalla Art Gallery until 9 April.

What the experts say:

"Daniel O'Toole is a highly accomplished and inventive artist. *Voices from the Void* sees Daniel push further into his artistic experimentations with sound, drawing on his background as a musician and training as an audio engineer. The work is multi-sensory and also experiential. It comprises nine bass drums [that] draw audiences in and focus them on the real magic of the work – a soundscape created by the harmonisation of the drums with each other, activated by the movement of audience members." – Eric Nash, director, Benalla Art Gallery, Victoria

(Opposite) Daniel O'Toole spraying a commissioned work, *Ascension*; the artist in his Melbourne studio