

Helen Martin's
'Into the Blessed Desert'
CATALOGUE
30.01.25-22.02.25

untether
gallery + studio

ARTIST STATEMENT

In February 2024 I ventured into the blessed Egyptian desert with a small group of fellow travellers, to visit some of its ancient Coptic monasteries and Pharaonic sites. It is the desert, and the centuries old monasteries that have remained with me.

The deserts we travelled through are stark, barren and featureless, so unlike my own experience of our Australian deserts. The Australian deserts are dry and hot, but they are also abundant with flora and fauna. In contrast, the Egyptian deserts we travelled through are not the graceful rolling dunes of golden sands so often depicted in glossy pictures of northern Africa. They are untidy, scarified, weathered a dull grey white and devoid of vegetation. They are scarred with quarries and rubble from the mining of limestone for construction materials to build the new highways, the fast train railways, the high-rise apartment buildings and other infrastructure as Egypt rushes to modernize.

We visited the monasteries in the west at Wadi el-Natrun (ancient Scetis) and in the eastern wilderness near the Red Sea. These sites, which were once a three and ten-day trek respectively by camel caravan from Cairo into a waterless wilderness, are now a few hours' drive away on multi lane highways speeding past irrigated olive groves and growing roadside villages.

The isolation and harshness of the landscape was, and remains, an essential element of the solitude sought by those choosing a life in these holy places. These monasteries started out as humble individual sketes, or caves, dug into the rocky desert landscape by the men and women who ventured there to live very simple and hard lives as hermits devoting themselves to prayer and contemplation. So many came that they began to organise themselves into communities, continuing to live in solitude but also sharing communal time once a week: dining together in the refectory at the ancient stone tables and celebrating the liturgy of the Eucharist in the multi domed adobe churches. And so these ancient monasteries were established and have endured since the mid-fourth century surviving repeated cycles of growth, destruction and abandonment. Now in the twenty first century urbanisation is rapidly encroaching on their seclusion posing new challenges.

On the days we were there the monasteries were bustling with family groups and individuals seeking healing from the saints and martyrs whose relics are enshrined in the churches. The dark robed monks quietly mingled and were sought out by pilgrims who touched their hand-held crosses for blessings.

These paintings depict places in the vast monastery complexes where pilgrims and visitors are allowed to spend time. I have focused on architectural features. The entrance gates in the massive safekeeping walls meters thick and several stories high mark the threshold between the holy and the worldly. Other features are: the ancient communal tables where meals were shared; the antique brass corona candelabra in the sacred spaces lighting the heavenly space above; the Keep/Fort where the monks retreated when under attack and could live for months at a time; the perpetual water springs which enable the communities to exist in the first place; the bell towers, the ancient stairwells and courtyards which are places of transition and rest.

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ARTIST STATEMENT (continued)

The dominant colours are limed and chalk white mixed with raw umber, ochre and iron oxides, contrasted with clear and deep cerulean. The beeswax medium allows me to represent the many layers of working and reworking of the surfaces of the buildings and desert landscapes.

What these paintings are unable to depict is the fragrance infused in the sacred spaces: the lingering aroma of incense used in the daily liturgies and the complex perfume of the healing oils provided in small vials to everyone who visits. The healing oils are made from the residue of the Holy Myron, anointing oil made from over 27 spices and fragrant resins and dispersed to Coptic churches throughout Egypt. Neither can I convey the meditative chant of the David Ensemble I listened to as I painted. With a rhythm and melismatic style unfamiliar to the Western ear, the ancient sacred music and chant of the Coptic liturgy provided the perfect background for the emergence of these works. In many ways I feel like I haven't yet left these places in Egypt.



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1.

Title: Eastern Wilderness – the Red Sea

Medium: Oil & beeswax on linen

Size: 91.5cm W x 91.5cm H

\$1780



2.

Title: Sunrise near Abu
Simbel

Medium: Oil & beeswax on
linen

Size: 91cm W x 61cm H

\$1525



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3.

Title: Abandoned
Village, Luxor

Medium: Oil & beeswax
on linen

Size: 91cm W x 61cm H

\$1525



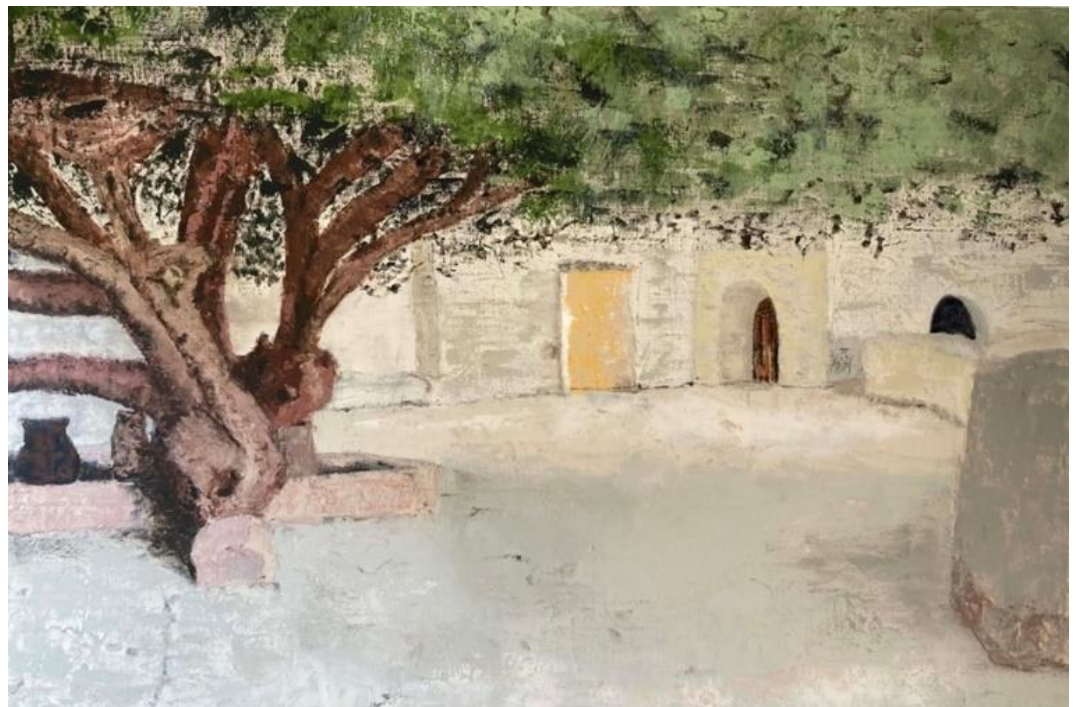
4.

Title: The Courtyard
Tree, St Paul's
Monastery

Medium: Oil & beeswax
on linen

Size: 91cm W x 61cm H

\$1525 SOLD



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5.

Title: The Ancient Table, St Antony's Monastery

Medium: Oil & beeswax on linen

Size: 76cm W x 76cm H

\$1525



6.

Title: The Ancient Arch, St Macarius Monastery

Medium: Oil & beeswax on linen

Size: 60cm W x 50cm H

\$1017 SOLD



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7.

Title: The Keep, St Antony's Monastery

Medium: Oil & beeswax on linen

Size: 56cm W x 46cm H

\$966



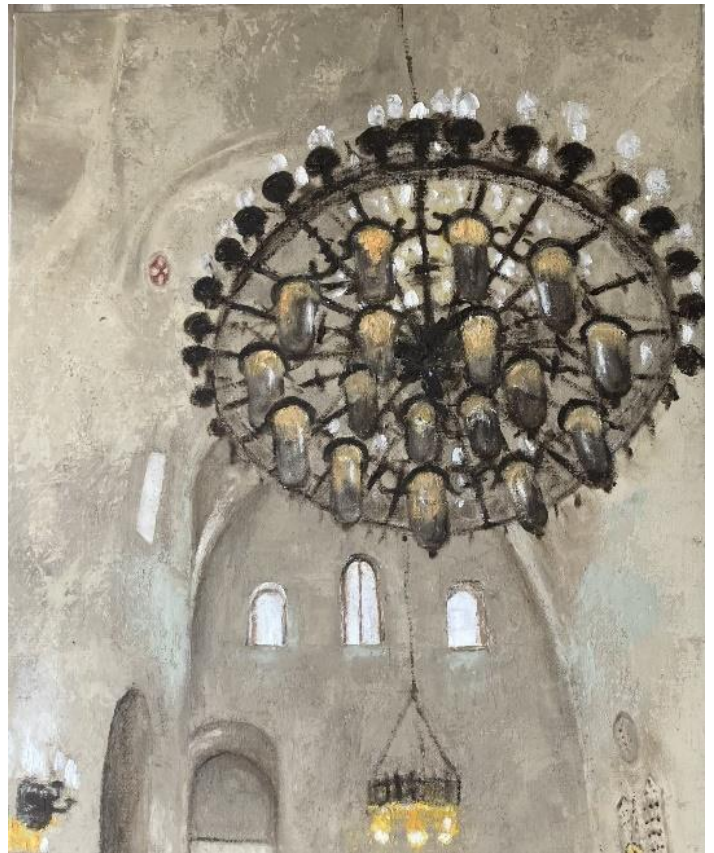
8.

Title: Glimpsing the Heavens, Al-Baramus Monastery I

Medium: Oil & beeswax on linen

Size: 46cm W x 56cm H

\$966



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9.

Title: Stairway into the Furnace – the Ancient
Limeburning Kiln, Al-Baramus Monastery

Medium: Oil & beeswax on linen

Size: 56cm W x 46cm H

\$966



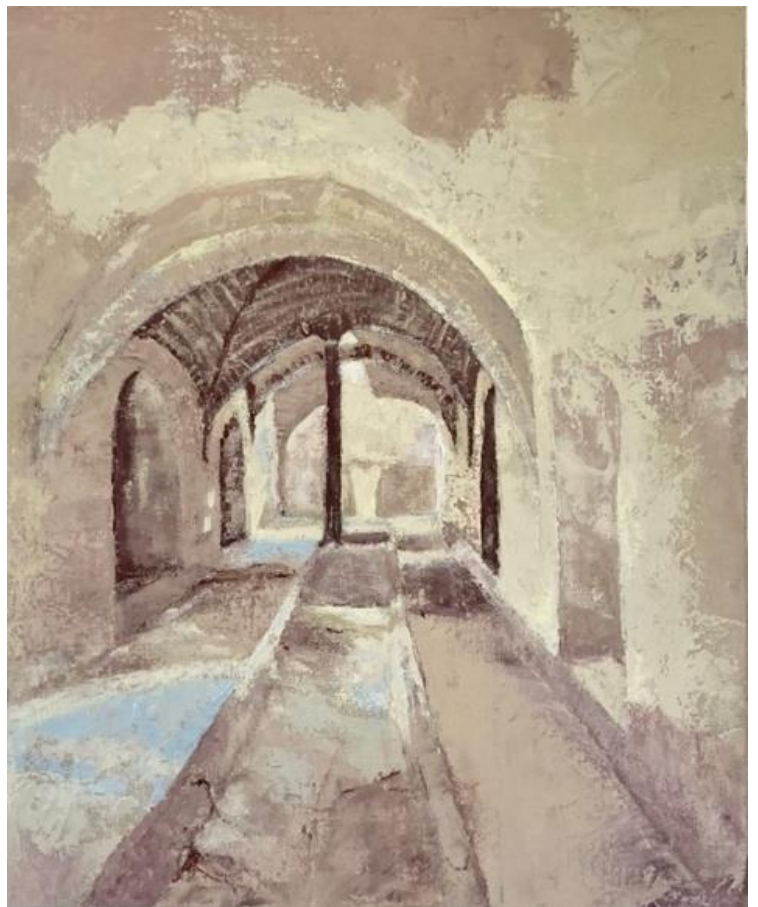
10.

Title: The Ancient Table, St Macarius Monastery

Medium: Oil & beeswax on linen

Size: 46cm W x 56cm H

\$966



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11.

Title: Glimpsing the Heavens, Al-Baramus Monastery II

Medium: Oil & beeswax on linen

Size: 56cm W x 46cm H

\$966



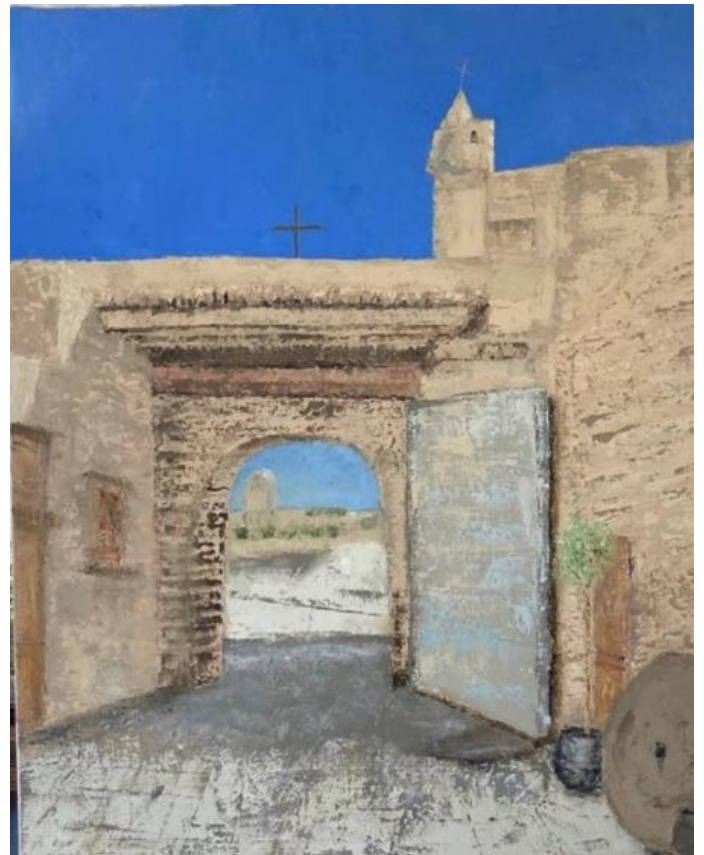
12.

Title: Looking Out the Entrance Gate, St Paul's Monastery

Medium: Oil & beeswax on linen

Size: 46cm W x 56cm H

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13.

Title: The Safekeeping Wall, St Paul's Monastery

Medium: Oil & beeswax on linen

Size: 51cm W x 41cm H

\$763



14.

Title: The Hidden Desert Sketes, St Macarius Monastery

Medium: Oil & beeswax on linen

Size: 41cm W x 31cm H

\$661



15.

Title: Abandoned Village, Luxor, Study

Medium: Oil & beeswax linen on board

Size: 30cm W x 21cm H

\$244 SOLD



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16.

Title: The Bell Tower, St Antony's Monastery

Medium: Oil & beeswax linen on board

Size: 25cm W x 25cm H

\$244 SOLD



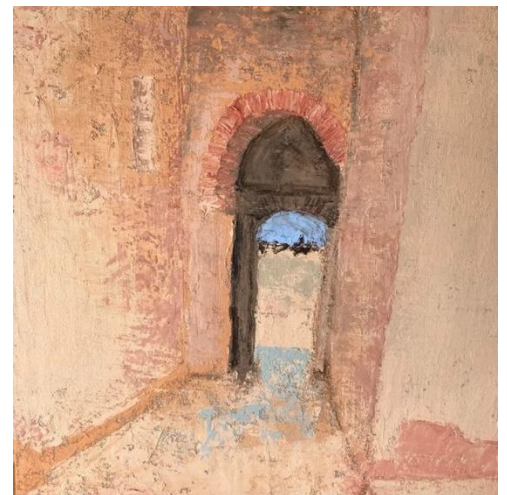
17.

Title: View to the Outside, Al Baramus

Medium: Oil & beeswax linen on board

Size: 25cm W x 25cm H

\$244 SOLD



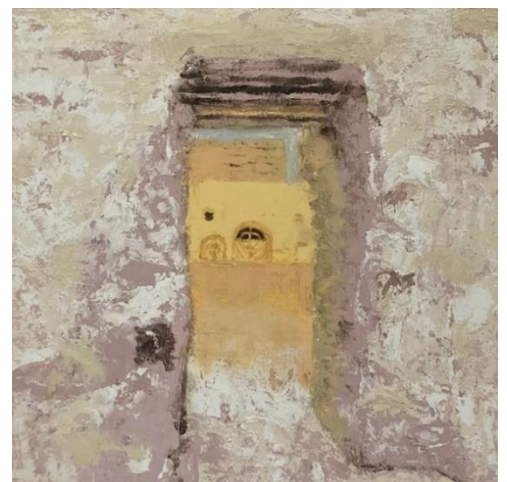
18.

Title: View to the Perpetual Spring, St Paul's Monastery

Medium: Oil & beeswax linen on board

Size: 25cm W x 25cm H

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19.

Title: The Keep, St Paul's Monastery

Medium: Oil & beeswax linen on board

Size: 25cm W x 25cm H

\$244 SOLD



20.

Title: The Keep Stairwell, St Macarius Monastery

Medium: Oil & beeswax linen on board

Size: 20cm W x 25.5cm H

\$244 SOLD



21.

Title: Blackstone Hills on the Road to Abu Simbel

Medium: Oil & beeswax canvas on board

Size: 25.5cm W x 20cm H

\$244



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22.

Title: Glimpse of Heaven I, Study

Medium: Oil & beeswax on canvas

Size: 20.5cm W x 20.5cm H

\$178



23.

Title: Glimpse of Heaven II, Study

Medium: Oil & beeswax on canvas

Size: 20.5cm W x 20.6cm H

\$178 SOLD



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Helen Martin CV

Born 1958, Leonora, Western Australia.
Works from her studio in Point Lonsdale, Victoria

Art and Design Education and Memberships:

2012-present, NAVA - Professional Member
2024, Natalie Granbow, *Tannins, Oxides and Indigo*, Maiwa School of Textiles, Online Course
2023, Tim McLaughlin & Charlotte Kwon, *Natural Dyes, Alchemy, Chemistry, Craft*, Maiwa School of Textiles, Online Course
2020, India Flint, *Eucaplyptographica*, The School of Nomad Arts – Online Course
2019, India Flint, *Being (t)here*, The School of Nomad Arts – Online Course
2018, India Flint, *Conscious Clothing*, The School of Nomad Arts - Online Course
2017, *Summer Blue: 3-day Indigo Workshop*, Beautiful Silks, Allensford, Victoria
2011, Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts), Gordon TAFE, Geelong, Victoria
2003-2009, Design Institute of Australia - Associate Member
2002, Diploma of Arts (Interior Design & Decoration), Gordon TAFE, Geelong, Victoria

Other Education:

2003, Certificate IV (Assessment & Workplace Training), Gordon TAFE, Geelong, Victoria
1995, Master of Arts (Public Policy), Murdoch University, Murdoch, Western Australia
1979, Bachelor of Arts (Social & Political Theory), Murdoch University, Murdoch, Western Australia

Awards:

2018, Second Place, 5x7 Art Prize, Art Is Gallery, Little Malop St, Geelong, Victoria.
2016, Open Entrant, Cossack Art Award, Karratha, Western Australia
2013, Finalist, Borough of Queenscliffe 150th Anniversary Art Award, Queenscliffe
2011, Outstanding Student Award, Bachelor's Degree, Gordon TAFE, Geelong, Victoria
2002, Best Final Year Student Award, Building & Design, Gordon TAFE, Geelong, Victoria

Academic Appointments:

2003-2007, Teacher (P/T), Interior Design & Decoration, School of Building & Design, Gordon TAFE, Geelong, Victoria

Design Practice:

2003-2008, Ruem, Interior Decoration & Design Practice, Newtown, Victoria

Visual Arts Practice (2011 forward):

Solo Exhibitions

2025, *'Into the Blessed Desert'* 30 January – 22 February, Untether Gallery + Studios, 5/132 Little Malop St, Geelong
2023, *Listening to the land: a retrospective exhibition of Australian landscape paintings*, 6-19 November 2023, The Grove Community Centre, 1 Leake St, Peppermint Grove, Western Australia
2023, *Salt Lakes: these tears in the landscape*, 10-18 June, North Wing Gallery, St George's Old School Hall, Queenscliff, Victoria
2022, *Ten years painting: a decade of change*, 29 October– 6 November, North Wing Gallery, St George's Old School Hall, Queenscliff, Victoria
2021, *This Land Laments*, 23-31 January, North Wing Gallery, St George's Old School Hall, Queenscliff, Victoria
2018, *These Clouds of Forgetting*, 14-15 & 21-22 July, Studio Gallery, St George's Old School Hall, Queenscliff, Victoria
2016, *The Cloud Horizon*, 5-15 October, Tacit Contemporary Art, 312 Johnston St Abbotsford, Victoria
2016, *The Cloud Horizon*, 23-25 April, Studio Gallery, St George's Old School Hall, Queenscliff, Victoria
2014, *Moments in Time*, 13-24 August, Tacit Contemporary Art, 312 Johnston St Abbotsford, Victoria

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2014, *A Disquieting Beauty*, 31-26 August, Etch Gallery & Studios, 215 Moorabool St Geelong, Victoria
2014, *A Disquieting Beauty*, 25-27 April, Studio Gallery, St George's Old School Hall, Queenscliff, Victoria
2013, *Moments in Time*, 6-8 April, Studio Gallery, St George's Old School Hall, Queenscliff, Victoria.
2012, *I am dark, but lovely: reading the land with the Song of Songs*, 16 May -19 June, Centre for Theology and Ministry and Dalton McCaughey Library, 29 College Cres, Parkville, Victoria
2012, *I am dark, but lovely: reading the land with the Song of Songs*, 9-11 April, Studio Gallery, St George's Old School Hall, Queenscliff, Victoria
2010, *Last Summer in Italy...*, 6-8 March, St George's Old School Hall, Queenscliff, Victoria.

Group Exhibitions

2022, *Small*, 6-17 December, 45 Downstairs, 45 Flinders Lane, Melbourne.
2021, *Linden Postcard Show*, 4 February - 15 March, Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts, 26 Acland St, St Kilda, Victoria.
2021, *Art Exhibition*, Humans in Geelong Expo, 5 December 2021, Mounting Yard Bar, Geelong Racecourse, Geelong.
2021, *Mangroves from the Water*, 26 July -11 August, Gordon Galley, 2 Fenwick St, Geelong (Delayed from July 2020 due to COVID 19 restrictions)
2019, *Point Lonsdale 10*, 16 February-3 March, Tussock Gallery, 89 Point Lonsdale Rd, Point Lonsdale, Victoria
2018/19, *Summer Expo, December – February*, Tussock Gallery, 89 Point Lonsdale Rd, Point Lonsdale, Victoria
2018, *Small*, 8 -17 November, 45 Downstairs, 45 Flinders Lane, Melbourne.
2018, *September Spaces 18*, 1-23 September, Tussock Gallery, 89 Point Lonsdale Rd, Point Lonsdale, Victoria
2018, *5x7 Art Prize*, 24 May -22 June Art is Gallery, Little Malop St, Geelong, Victoria
2017, *Bellarine Arts Trail*, November, Open Studio, Queenscliff, Victoria
2017, *Spring Expo*, September-November, Tussock Gallery, 89 Point Lonsdale Rd, Point Lonsdale, Victoria
2017, *Autumn Art Expo*, 1-28 May, Tussock Gallery, 89 Point Lonsdale Rd, Point Lonsdale, Victoria
2017, *On Water*, 21 January – 11 February, Deakin University, Sally Walker Project Space, 1 Gheringhap St, Geelong, Victoria
2016-17, *Summer Expo*, December - March, Tussock Gallery, 89 Point Lonsdale Rd, Point Lonsdale, Victoria
2016 *Autumn Art Expo*, 15 February to 2 July, Tussock Gallery, 89 Point Lonsdale Rd, Point Lonsdale, Victoria
2015, *'Light Works'*, 29 April – 23 May, Etch Gallery & Studios, 215 Moorabool St, Geelong, Victoria
2015, *'Shades'*, 29 April - 23 May, Etch Gallery & Studios, 215 Moorabool St, Geelong, Victoria
2014, *October Spaces*, 13 October- 9 November, Tussock Gallery, 89 Point Lonsdale Rd, Point Lonsdale, Victoria
2013, *October Spaces*, 30 September - 27 October, Tussock Gallery, 89 Point Lonsdale Rd, Point Lonsdale, Victoria
2013, *Surprise Spring Show*, 9-29 September, Tussock Gallery, 89 Point Lonsdale Rd, Point Lonsdale, Victoria
2013, *Borough of Queenscliffe 150th Anniversary Art Award Exhibition*, Tussock Gallery, 89 Point Lonsdale Rd, Point Lonsdale, Victoria
2012, *Off the Wall*, 10 December 2012 - 7 January 2013, Tussock Gallery, 89 Point Lonsdale Rd, Point Lonsdale, Victoria
2012, *Printmaking 12A*, 27 April - 10 May, Brunswick Street Gallery, 322 Brunswick St, Fitzroy, Victoria
2012, *Linden Postcard Show*, 4 February - 15 March, Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts, 26 Acland St, St Kilda, Victoria
2011, *UNCOMMON Threads*, Graduate Exhibition, 24 November – 8 December, Basement Studios, The Gordon TAFE, Geelong, Victoria

Eco-dye Textile Practice (2015 forward):

Solo Exhibitions

2023, *Eco print Pop up Art Shop*, 21-25 April, Foyer, St George's Old School Hall, Queenscliff, Victoria.
2022, *Second Collection*, 21-22 May, North Wing Gallery, St George's Old School Hall, Queenscliff, Victoria.
2019, *First Collection*, 27 January, Studio Gallery, St George's Old School Hall, Queenscliff, Victoria.

Group Exhibitions

2019, *Gardens of the Heart – India Flint and Friends*, 22 Feb-17 March, FABRIK Art & Heritage, Lobethal, South Australia

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2019. School of Nomad Arts On- line Exhibition, Beautiful Silks, Allensford, Victoria from March 2019,
<https://www.beautifulsilks.com/product-category/supplies/nomad-arts-waste-to-wealth-dress/>

Commissions & Workshops

2025, upcoming Eco Print ingTwo day Workshop, 24-25 May, Brighton, Adelaide
2023, Eco Print on Paper One day Workshop, February, Queenscliff Neighbourhood House, Queenscliff
2020, Cord and Tassel Project, August Anglican Parish St James and St George in Borough of Queenscliff, Victoria.

Spirituality, Art and Design Collaborations:

2015, 5 December, 'Exploring A Profound Response to Desire – Icon and Music', Facilitator, St George's Old School Hall, Queenscliff Victoria
2014, Multi Faith Quiet Space Design Consultancy, Westhaven Aged Care Community, 50 Pickett St, Footscray, Victoria
2013-16, Icon Writing at St George's Anglican Church, Facilitator, Queenscliff, Victoria
2007, Symbols & Liturgical Space Consultation - Christ Church Anglican Cathedral, Ballarat, Victoria.
2007, Symbols of Lent Mosaic Workshop - St James Anglican Church, Point Lonsdale
2007, Advent Lantern Workshop, Co-facilitator, All Saints' Anglican Church, Newtown, Victoria
2006, Symbols of Lent Mosaic Workshop - All Saints' Anglican Church, Newtown.
2006, Advent Lantern Workshop, Co-facilitator, All Saints' Anglican Church, Newtown, Victoria
2004, Symbols & Liturgical Space Consultation-St John's Anglican Church Geelong West, Victoria.
2004, Symbols & Liturgical Space Consultation - All Saints' Anglican Church, Newtown, Victoria.
2003, Symbols & Liturgical Space Consultation - Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Williamstown, Victoria
2001, Symbols of Lent Mosaic Workshop - All Saints' Anglican Church, Newtown, Victoria
2000, Symbols of Lent Mosaic Workshop - Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Williamstown, Victoria

Publications

August 2021, Stephanie Neville, 'The beautiful paintings of Helen Martin',<https://mangrovesfromthewater.com/2021/08/06/the-beautiful-paintings-of-helen-martin/>
October 2012, Chelle Trebilcock, 'Arise my love, by Helen Martin', <http://reddresstheology.com/2012/08/08/arise-my-love-by-helen-martin/>

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