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# LAST DAYS OF THE BLOCKBUSTER; OCCASIONAL TREMORS; WIDOWER; LISMORE FLOOD

Mike Ladd

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## Last Days of the Blockbuster

The palette of Degas,  
an abstract before its time.

Manet's moon,  
Seurat's grass.

The clouds, the snows,  
the rooftops.

Pissarro's green dreaming  
under boughs—

These are the last days  
of the blockbuster.

'You can't see it  
until you stand back'

says my old mother,  
leaning on my arm.

Monet's same church  
in fifteen different lights.

We don't exit  
through the gift shop:

'I've got more postcards than I could ever use'  
she says, 'even a calendar is risky.'

If this was a film  
Bach unaccompanied cello

would start playing  
over the credits.

We go back  
against the flow,

'It wasn't much up close  
but now I see the reflections.

The sky in the water.  
The last bit of light.

## Occasional Tremors

That's not the Shinkansen coming in  
or a rock concert crescendo—

that's the whole tarred-over earth  
having a little shimmy.

The bass note  
goes right through your spine.

Don't rattle those dishes at me:  
I know I haven't done them yet.

The map gets crinkled  
by deeper routes.

In the after-silence one word echoes:  
Surface. Surface. Surface.

## Widower

(Cleaning Up After a Storm)

All calm now as he sweeps the drive.  
The garden radio (a beaten transistor)  
plays *Wild is the Wind* by Nina Simone.

Tree bark, like torn sleeves,  
discarded sashes from a race,  
piles in front of his broom.

He finds a nest, like a nebula,  
inside, the core felted to cup an egg.  
Some small life began here before the storm.

*Like a leaf clings to a tree, Oh my darling cling to me,  
For we are creatures of the wind...*  
Nina's voice, a deep, burnished moan.

Last night, he walked the streets  
as the wires were clashing, branches snapping,  
bins blown banging along the road,

returning in the small hours to this shocked house  
from which she has,  
irretrievably, gone.

## Lismore Flood

Barbers' chairs turn slowly in the current,  
dummies in bridal white are baptised  
in the brown, uncontrollable river.

Blindly the flood reads its way through the bookshop,  
prizes opens cabinet drawers in Centrelink  
and blurs the files.

In the Crystal Shop it muddies the facets,  
adds shit notes to the essential oils.

The wood from the lumberyard heads downstream  
the way it used to do in red cedar days.

Afterwards, lower stories vomit their insides out,  
line the pavements with a white-goods spume.

Through the town there's a line drawn  
on windows and walls.  
Friends help mop up. Some stay, some go.  
Fans aerate the shells of shops.

A notice in the jeweller's: *After thirty years  
I was beaten by a raindrop. All commissions  
will be honoured. It may take time.*

*I have your names but some are now illegible.  
Please call this number...*

The swamp oaks make ambiguous sighs  
drawing in the water left rippling at their feet.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Mike Ladd

Mike Ladd lives and writes in Adelaide. He ran *Poetica* on ABC Radio National for two decades and currently works for Radio National's features and documentaries unit. He had published nine collections of poems and short prose. The most recent is *Invisible Mending* from Wakefield Press.

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