

In 1998, a significant exhibition entitled *The Birds of Black Thursday* showcased ten powerful paintings from Ray Ching's series of the same title. These works had been undertaken as a reflection on, and commemoration of the Black Thursday bushfires in the state of Victoria; *A Terrible Event Over the Mallee* belongs to the third part of this series.

The devastation of these 1851 bushfires effected over 5 million hectares of land. It is on record that as the fires spread, birds and other wildlife were dropping from the trees in all directions. It is one such moment that we encounter in this work.

Ching has realised a scene of violent beauty, and there is a real potency to this depiction of a singular plummeting avian life. He has chosen to completely de-contextualise the subject from the surrounding chaotic action in favour of capturing a single moment. One imagines that if this were a film, we would be witnessing this scene in slow-motion. Wings fully spread and resplendent in colour, the work possesses a theatricality of almost-Renaissance proportions, and is striking to behold.