

Above: On the Run, below: Magpie



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NATURE REGARDED

Making art is never the means of finding insight. It is rather the reflection of a growing consciousness... (Drury)

Over the past 15 years my work has been about land and landscape, in particular about the Australian bush and coastal region. I am especially interested in the reasons why we prefer one landscape over another.

Geographer Jay Appleton believes that our preference for certain landscapes has a biological basis and so is much older than our western civilized world. His 'habitat theory' suggests that we are drawn to parkland environments because initially this savannah type of landscape was necessary for survival, affording hiding places for safety and shelter as well as open areas to view and catch food. Appleton's approach removes the barriers between the arts and sciences, giving a more complete understanding of particular behaviour. It encourages a greater understanding of our place within nature and the interconnectedness of our planet and ourselves.

The deconstruction of the concept of humanity's superiority over nature has brought with it the concept of Gaia. Art historian Sasha Grishin, in his book about artist John Wolseley, says: Gaia, as formulated in the 1970s, can be viewed as essentially a 'verbal shorthand', for a whole philosophy concerning a living earth which developed out of many of the ideas inherent in earth sciences. Gaia,



more accurately termed geophysiology, postulates that the earth is a living entity, where the tectonic plates are biologically driven and where the biosphere is self-regulating to maximise the health of the planet through the control of the chemical and physical environment.

My work combines a love of the natural world, its colours and textures, with drawing, printing, dyeing, fabric and stitch. It is about the fragility and beauty of the coastal area in which I live and about our unconscious memorising of particular aspects of the landscape that later resurfaces into consciousness.

The scale of my work ranges from small to larger works. Images are collaged and cropped, bringing the viewer close to the landscape, turning the micro into the macro. Viewing works together gives a sense of movement through different geographies, describing 'the transition from the filtered sunlight of the bush, muted colour, muffled sound, and the call of pied magpies — to the dazzling light and the bright colours of the seashore, the sound of the waves, the warmth of the sun on skin, the sand between toes' (Sarah Tucker).

Tania Kovats, in 'The Drawing Book', describes drawing as 'a primary act of creativity, like breathing. Experience and thought is taken in or inhaled into the lungs of consciousness, and then via drawing, exhaled onto the paper. This breathing process could be anything from meditative and repetitive, a deep sigh, a whisper, or a panting, full of energy and exertion; regular breathing, a breath held in anticipation, a shallow last breath or death rattle.'

Drawing creates lines 'that are drawn, printed, painted, stitched, embossed, or cut ... a link, a trace, a boundary, or an interruption. The line of stitching connects layers of cloth, creates texture and a sense of movement as the eye is drawn over the surface. As a line, a stitch may form a border, denote a hesitation, or create a new beginning. A line of thought or a line of stitching doesn't always travel in a straight line and, like a line in the sand it can scatter, fill

in, outline—as sand grains fill each crevice, each hollow’ (Sarah Tucker).

I am interested in the passage of time and how this may be represented. Drawing can do this since an individual drawing has a timeline built into it and so contains the trace of actions carried out over time. The passage of time can also be represented by drawing with ink until the pigment fades or printing until the ink runs out.

My exploration of the local landscape has been manifested through printed and dyed textiles and paper. I exploit the contrast between the vibrancy of commercial dyes and the more subdued colours achieved through plant dyes, so securing the fabric in time and place, as the plant gives up a different shade of colour depending on the season, weather conditions and soil type. Commercial dyes reference our contemporary lifestyle with its use of technology and love of colour. They also capture those colours of the landscape that cannot be reproduced using indigenous plant dyes.

I collect as I walk. I collect vegetation for dyeing on a seasonal basis thus giving me an indication of the response of the landscape to varying weather conditions. Other materials such as seaweed, mangrove, gum, banksia, teatree, sedge and sand are collected to be used in different ways. Seaweed is stuck onto card to make a collagraphic printing block. Monoprints are made from sedges, banksia and mangrove leaves. Some vegetation is incorporated into the art works. Screen printing stencils are made from rubbings of plant material as well as drawings and photographs taken from a site. Textures

and colours are simulated on paper and fabric. Images, colours and shapes are printed. After amassing all this information and material the process of collaging them becomes the primary function.

During the collaging process blocks of colour move in front and behind each other and the actual ground becomes ambiguous. I am attracted to this process because it invites the unpredictable as colours, textures and shapes are moved around and considered. There is never one solution to any particular artistic problem, but many. I like this, although sometimes there may be too many possibilities.

I relate to Jeanette Winterson’s comments on her writing style as they resonate with my collaging process. In her introduction to ‘Oranges are not the Only Fruit’, she says of her style, ‘It offers a complicated narrative structure disguised as a simple one ...’ ‘...you can read in spirals. As a shape the spiral is fluid and allows infinite movement. But is it movement backwards and forwards? Is it height or depth? Draw several, each drifting into each and all this will be clear.

Hilary Peterson

References:

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- Jay Appleton: The Experience of Landscape, John Wiley, 1975
- Sasha Grishin: John Wolseley 1998
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- Tania Kovats, editor: The Drawing Book, 2006
- Jeanette Winterson: Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit, Introduction, 1991



Seaside Shuffle