

Air, Light & Space: Contemporary Abstraction



Wendy Stokes, *Untitled #2*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 152 x 456cm (3 panels), (detail). Courtesy of the artist and Catherine Asquith Gallery.



Angus Nivison, *Light & Dark II*, 2011, acrylic, charcoal, pigments & gesso on paper, 175 x 125cm. Courtesy of the artist and Utopia Art Sydney.

LIST OF WORKS

Michael Cusack

- French Navy*, 2012, mixed media on board, 50 x 60cm.
Courtesy of the artist and Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney.
- Combe*, 2012, mixed media on board, 50 x 60cm.
Courtesy of the artist and Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney.
- Zurich*, 2012, mixed media on board, 50 x 60cm.
Courtesy of the artist and Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney.
- Archive (9) Kippenberg*, 2009, mixed media on linen, 137 x 168cm.
Courtesy of the artist and Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney.
- Archive (2) Goudy Sans*, 2009, mixed media on linen, 80 x 100cm.
Courtesy of the artist and Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney.
- Archive (4) Cooper*, 2009, mixed media on linen, 80 x 100cm.
Courtesy of the artist and Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney.

Angus Nivison

- Reading the sky*, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 200 x 180cm.
Courtesy of the artist and Utopia Art Sydney.
- Vestige*, 2011, acrylic on canvas, 200 x 180cm.
Courtesy of the artist and Utopia Art Sydney.
- Light & Dark I*, 2011, acrylic, charcoal, pigments & gesso on paper, 175 x 125cm.
Courtesy of the artist and Utopia Art Sydney.
- Light & Dark II*, 2011, acrylic, charcoal, pigments & gesso on paper, 175 x 125cm.
Courtesy of the artist and Utopia Art Sydney.

Wendy Stokes

- Untitled #1*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 760cm (5 panels).
Courtesy of the artist and Catherine Asquith Gallery.
- Untitled #2*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 152 x 456cm (3 panels).
Courtesy of the artist and Catherine Asquith Gallery.

GLASSHOUSE REGIONAL GALLERY

Niomi Sands: Gallery Curator
Skye Frost: Public Programs and Audience Development
Marie Taylor: Graphic Design | Digital Signs and Printing: Catalogue Printing

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**GLASSHOUSE
PORT MACQUARIE**



Michael Cusack

Born in Dublin, Ireland in 1960, emigrated to Australia in 1982. Lives and works in Byron Bay.

In 1997 Michael graduated with a Diploma of Fine Arts from the Hunter Institute of Technology, New South Wales. Since his first solo exhibition at Nick Mitzevich Gallery, Newcastle (2001), Michael has held regular shows at Brian Moore Gallery, Sydney; Jan Murphy Gallery, Brisbane; Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney; and more recently, Karen Woodbury Gallery, Melbourne. Cusack has participated in numerous group exhibitions in regional galleries across NSW and the ACT.

Angus Nivison

Born in Walcha, NSW, in 1953. Lives and works in Walcha, NSW.

Angus has exhibited regularly in group exhibitions since 1974 and in solo shows since 1982. In 2002 he won both the Wynne Prize (in which he has been represented five times) and the Muswellbrook Art Prize. He has also won the Kedumba Drawing Prize. Nivison has been selected as a finalist for the Archibald Prize three times. He has also been represented three times in the Archibald Salon des Refusés. His work is held in numerous private and public collections in Australia including the Art Gallery of NSW.

Wendy Stokes

Born in 1957, Wellington NSW, Lives and works in Port Macquarie.

A professional artist since 1980 Wendy has exhibited extensively, throughout Australia and internationally, including Montreal, Seoul, and Hong Kong. Wendy is well represented in Australian public galleries and museums including the National Gallery of Australia; Print Council of Australia; Port Macquarie-Hastings Council Collection; Bathurst Regional Gallery; Warnambool Regional Gallery; Parliament House, Canberra; Artbank; Grafton Regional Gallery; and numerous corporate collections.

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Special thanks to the Glasshouse Technical Team and Volunteers for all their hard work on installing this exhibition.

The Glasshouse is supported by the NSW Government through Arts NSW.

Cover image: **Michael Cusack, Combe**, 2012, mixed media on board, 50 x 60cm. Courtesy of the artist and Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney

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OPENING HOURS
Tuesday - Friday: 10am - 5pm
Saturday - Sunday: 10am - 4pm
Public Holidays: 10am - 4pm



GLASSHOUSE PORT MACQUARIE REGIONAL GALLERY



Wendy Stokes, *Untitled #1*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 760cm (5 panels), (detail). Courtesy of the artist and Catherine Asquith Gallery.

INTRODUCTION

Air, Light & Space continues the Glasshouse Regional Gallery's commitment to supporting Australian artists and contemporary art practice. It is with great pleasure that we present this mesmerising exhibition of recent paintings by Michael Cusack, Angus Nivison and Wendy Stokes.

The paintings presented in *Air, Light & Space*, capture an intangible response to the natural and built environment through the medium of abstraction. A fleeting memory of the way light hits foliage, the ephemeral nature of a reflection, and the angular shadows of a cityscape provide inspiration for artists Michael Cusack, Angus Nivison and Wendy Stokes. Each painting encapsulates the very essence of place through mark making and application of paint, effectively creating visual representations of atmosphere, air, light, shade and space.

Michael Cusack's work is a response to landscape, experience and architecture. He is particularly interested in the relationship between two-dimensional and three-dimensional space, as well as the visual language of the built environment.

Angus Nivison is well known for his bold paintings that capture the energy of the NSW south-eastern Northern Tablelands, where he explores the ever-changing landscape: from the depths of a dark bush night, to the blistering brightness of a summer day.

Wendy Stokes' work is influenced by the rituals of daily life and her coastal surrounds. Her works are a direct response to experience, where she transforms a series of moments into the very essence of an experience through her sensitive use of paint application and mark making.

I would like to sincerely thank Michael Cusack, Angus Nivison and Wendy Stokes for sharing these magnificent works and I would also like to thank Louise Martin Chew for her wonderful essay; that provides delightful insight into the work of these artists. I would like to thank all the staff at Martin Browne Contemporary, Utopia Art Sydney and Catherine Asquith Gallery for their generous support in making this exhibition possible.

Niomi Sands
Gallery Curator



Michael Cusack, *Archive (4) Cooper*, 2009, mixed media on linen, 80 x 100cm. Courtesy of the artist and Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney.

AIR, LIGHT & SPACE: CONTEMPORARY ABSTRACTION

Recently, I heard a flock of bell birds calling. Chimes, shards of sound, descended from tall trees like a veil of song that captured the forest and seemed to harness space and time. *Air, Light & Space*, a curated selection of abstract paintings by Michael Cusack, Angus Nivison and Wendy Stokes, envision space, colour and memory in a way that pulls me back into that experience. The paintings create a holistic ambience that evokes and extends the natural and built environment in which each artist lives and works.

The work in this exhibition is from the central NSW region, an area with dramatic coastline and quiet bush and farmland. Each of the paintings speaks to the essence of a locality – using individualised abstract means to capture space, shade, air and light, but also the atmospherics, spirit and subtle nuance of a place outside the busyness of a more homogenised urban environment.

Wendy Stokes constructs her work as an immersive experience. *Untitled #1 and #2* embrace the viewer with their overwhelming size (760cm and 456cm wide respectively). Drawn from her intimate knowledge of the coastal area in which she has lived for some twenty years, they also offer the viewer imaginative space within the canvas. White unprimed canvas is overwritten with a multiplicity of colours from sky and sea – greens, purples, blues and greys – that form a series of calligraphic and gestural islands. These drift together, a micro-environment of marks in a language that speaks to the physicality of the coast.

They evoke the misting sensation that comes with the salt beach experience, a space in which to imprint new memories, or just to be. Stokes said, "My daily ritual is immersed in the coastal landscape experience of air, light, space and water, so as a painter landscape becomes a spatial experience of nature rather than a view."¹

Michael Cusack's paintings respond to his coastal environment of Byron Bay in their capture of light, but equally to architecture and

his early life in Ireland. Interpretation of these enigmatically titled paintings may be as expressive of the viewer's state of mind as they are of his own. Floating areas of different colours cling together, hovering around the centre of the canvas. Within them is the sense of a private code or rhythm of the artist's making. Surfaces are scratched, stained, and scuffed, without narrative outside their own shape and time. Cusack suggested that these paintings are not created as abstractions, rather, "I see them as problems to be worked out within themselves"².

Angus Nivison is based in Walcha and his work has a more discernible landscape basis than that of Cusack and Stokes. Nonetheless, it extends the abstract theme in this exhibition with two works, *Light & Dark I and II* (2011) that capture dark vertical lines (like tree trunks) as they emerge from a diaphanous white background. Organic dark stripes press forward against the picture plane, and evoke the dominant verticality of an Australian forest. Curved horizontal lines are finer, branching web-like connections that adjoin the dark areas to create a delicate yet moody tension. The restricted palette in these works creates contrast and cultivates the impression of an interior or solitary sensibility.

Air, Light & Space showcases the work of three mature artists whose abstract works harness and extend, even for those who may never have been there, the subtle atmospherics of these – and other – places. They offer a range of imaginary responses – an exploration of the depths and complexities of nature, human experience, and the richly evocative aesthetic portal available through this medium.

Louise Martin-Chew

¹ Wendy Stokes, note to the author, January 2013

² Michael Cusack, interview with the author, 2008



Angus Nivison, *Light & Dark I*, 2011, acrylic, charcoal, pigments & gesso on paper, 175 x 125cm. Courtesy of the artist and Utopia Art Sydney.